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Letters to Make-Believe: An Afterschool Survival Kit

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Letters to Make-Believe:
An Afterschool Survival Kit

Jessica Maginity

2013-2014

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This thesis would not have been imaginable without the help of some pretty incredible people. I can't do them justice in the page I'm devoting to this, but I really can't allow this to begin without acknowledging the fact that I probably wouldn't be alive to type this right now if not for their help.

First, I would like to thank my committee. Beth Benedix is a saint whose passion for her work and kindness with people has inspired me every step of the way. Our conversations have really forced me to clarify my goals when I walk into the classroom and have helped me keep the ideals expressed in this document in sight even when I'm frustrated. I cannot express the wonders Professor Sununu has done for my writing, for my discipline, and for the way I think in general. The influence on individual attention I stress in my thesis comes partially from working with her; I never cease to be amazed at the amount of attention she gives her students with her conferences and her reunions. She takes her students and their work seriously, and it improves them enormously. Tim Good helped me to define what I was doing and why. I don't mention this in my thesis, but we went to a conference in Portugal together where we presented our individual research. Consistently in my work with him, I've seen the way he always tries to make his work applicable to real life; his passion to make real change has kept me aware of the real implications of this project as a case study.

I would also like to thank my volunteers. My volunteers have been wonderful and patient and the energy they bring to work with the kids is invaluable. The kids clearly make all of this possible. At this point, I kind of see this work as a tribute to them; they've taught me more than any of the experts I read over the summer. I would also like to thank the Honor Scholar office for being wonderful. Amy, Peg, and Kevin have all been really supportive and helpful, and I owe about 18 hours of extra sleep to whoever decided to extend the deadline. Some wonderful teachers I had in high school, Mr. Sparks and Mrs. Gardner, illustrated how important taking students seriously really is for their intellectual development.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for always taking me seriously. Yes, that's a bit tongue-in-cheek, but my parents have always been supportive of me even when I'm a bit pigheaded. They got me reading early, they encouraged every creative outlet, and I owe where I am to them.

INTRODUCTION

The document that you are about to read is misleading on a fundamental level. At the moment, it is around eighty pages long and is divided into four chapters. Each chapter has what I like to think of as a clever title and is further divided into subsections that make it more digestible and organized-looking. This introduction is going to tell you what to expect from each section, as any introduction in an academic paper is expected to do. If I have succeeded at all, there shouldn't be too much ambiguity about what I want you to get from this paper.

And yet every word is misleading you. The context of this work is the deadline for the 2014 senior honor scholar thesis at DePauw University. I will be turning this document in on April 7th under the name of my thesis. Thus, every word you are reading claims to be a part of my thesis, claims to be the project to which I have devoted a year of my time and energy. Its very length suggests the prominence of this document as the product, relegates the experience my project to the role of research. This is not the case. My honor scholar project was the implementation of an afterschool storytelling program called Letters to Make-Believe. This document consists of the research, narrative of, and reflection on my experience doing this.

The first section, Speculating Make-Believe, is the research. It has my original design for a folklore-themed creative writing/critical reading program and touches on the areas of curriculum development, digital humanities, critical literacy, creative writing, folklore studies, the relationship between reading and writing, and the psychological benefits of collaborative creativity. I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted at this point, and so a lot of my time was spent defining the goals I had for the program.

I talk about the Paulo Freire's influence on my educational philosophy, making particular use of the banking and dialogic models of schooling. Another helpful figure, John Barell,

applies Freirean principles to current problems in the American educational system in *Developing More Curious Minds*. Whereas Freire talks about the importance of student-centered and student-directed learning in terms of political empowerment and humanist self-actualization, Barell talks about a more practical element of this approach – it works better. When students are more engaged in the act of asking questions as well as answering them, they are learning to think and not parrot their teacher's thoughts. They will go farther in their studies, think in more dynamic, innovative ways, and the enjoyment they get out of their work will boost their confidence and have lifelong benefits.

Next I talk about specific applications of critical literacy, creative writing, and theater exercises that help further my goals and the benefits of these activities on children. I include a few psychological studies which look at the benefits of creative activity on children, the benefit of collaboration on both creativity and psychological well-being, the benefits of afterschool programming and individual attention on children, and will close with an article about the benefits a creative writing program had on a group of HIV-positive children. While I think that the value of the arts for children is qualitative and not quantitative, I included these studies to show that setups like mine have worked.

However, the process matters so much more than the product looked at in these studies, and so *Surviving Make-Believe* takes a closer look at what actually happened when I walked into the elementary school. What did happen was much different from what I envision in the first section; if it feels like you are reading a completely paper at this point, this is because the project turned into something completely different on September 12th. I include detailed examples of lesson plans and activities. I describe specific lessons I learned each week and traces the evolution of what the physical workshop looks like. My methods weren't the only thing that

changed; after I'd been doing it a while, I found that my motivations had also shifted. I think they matured as I adjusted to practical problems and got to know the kids and what they liked to do.

For the next chapter, Surveying Make-Believe, I take a step back and reflect on what was important. On reflection, the structure of Letters Make-Believe owed a huge philosophical debt to Freire. I became disillusioned with the anarchic possibilities of his methods soon after I actually had a room full of kids, but I still adapted a generative method when it came to the very structure and the goals of the program. I came up with ways to assess whether what I was doing was effective, and I made changes every week. The point of this chapter is to identify the main concepts (usually problems, but sometimes just a new goal that emerged) that drove those changes. Some of these issues include clarity in communication, lesson plans, structure, volunteers, and discipline. I analyze the problem in more detail than in the previous section, talk about how I handled it, talk about whether or not I think I was successful, and suggestions for people trying to do similar things.

In my concluding chapter, I talk a bit more about the essence of this year: the kids. The entire point of this thesis is that they are the most important part of any arts programming. Schools might be forced to meet certain requirements, but extracurricular arts programs have the freedom to pay attention to the real needs of kids and how art can be used to meet them and to empower the kids to address their own problems. If I have managed to instill just a little more confidence, to help along a budding passion, or just to illustrate to them that their voice matters to a pseud-authority picture, I have succeeded. These things are hard to judge, however, and the long-term effects are impossible for me to judge, and so I conclude with some kids that had a particular impact on me.

Speculating Make-Believe: The Research

The Problem

I used to cry when forced to write. I spent every other recess in first grade inside redoing my assignments because my handwriting was so terrible that my teacher couldn't tell what I'd written. My handwriting wasn't an indication of my ability as a student; I read at an advanced level from an early age. I was reading the *Chronicles of Narnia* by myself in first grade and *The Hobbit* in second grade, followed by *The Lord of the Rings* in third grade. This was on my own. In class, I remember that we read *Because of Winn Dixie* in third grade. We read *The Boxcar Children* in first grade. These are the only two stories, other than Dr. Seuss, I encountered in school that really had an impact on me before middle school when we got to Poe.

What on earth were my English teachers doing before then, you might ask? We were learning the Shirley method. Year after year, we learned about nouns, verbs, and adjectives. When we wrote, it was to demonstrate that we knew at least four or five adjectives and could put them in the right place. And so I learned to dread writing. Reading was great; I did that on my own for fun. Writing was just another word for busy work.

My eighth grade English teacher changed that. Mr. Sparks's favorite author was Edgar Allen Poe. I still remember how excited he got about "Anabelle Lee," which I understand a lot better now that I'm a fan of Plath's "Lady Lazarus" than I did as an eighth grader whose reading habits more often than not involved dwarves and elves and magic. At the time, we all thought it was pretty creepy; it didn't help that he had a birthday chant about misery, despair, and death that he had people stand on their desks to intone on their special day. This strange man, however, changed the course of my creative life and educational career with a single assignment.

One day Mr. Sparks pulled out a book of illustrations by Chris Van Allsburg called *The Mysteries of Harold Burdick*. He didn't tell us what he wanted from us immediately—he just had us look at the illustrations. They were fantastic pictures; fascinating scenes of birds escaping from a boy's wallpaper, streamliners crashing through the streets of Venice, and houses launching into outer space. The pictures each had a caption, one or two sentences long, which gave just a suggestion of a story in the context of the picture. Mr. Sparks had us each choose one of the pictures and write the first chapter of a novel about it.

I still can't explain quite how significant that felt to me. I remember feeling something very serious, almost mystical. Now I see it as a thirst for a creative outlet I'd been craving all my life; then it felt like destiny (please remember, I was in eighth grade). I turned my picture into the opening of a fantasy epic; I spent hours more than I probably should have and wrote pages more than everyone else. Okay, so what? So, Mr. Sparks took me as seriously as I was taking myself. He took me more seriously, in fact. On the last day of school, he pulled me aside and had me read my story in front of the class. This was a nice gesture. However, he hadn't done that to anyone else. I was a painfully shy eighth grade girl forced to stand at the front of the class and read a story that just seemed to grow longer the longer I stood up there and read it. It was such a disaster that he pulled me aside and apologized later.

But he didn't just apologize; he told me that I should keep writing. He wasn't patronizing about it; he just said that he felt like I had potential and that I should consider writing. I had already planned to do that, but it's been eight years and I still remember that thirty second conversation on the last day of school. Never underestimate the power of being taken seriously. That summer, I kept working on my story. I wrote until I had over 200 pages of notes and drafts; I got tired of my ideas running ahead of my ability to write complexly so I put it on

hold. Since then, I've written plays, poetry, started another novel, and more analytical essays than I'd care to think about. Right now, I'm putting the finishing touches on this 150 page behemoth.

Have I accomplished anything spectacular? Not particularly, but my experiences with writing have become a meaningful part of my life that change the way I think about things, improved my ability as a student, and encourage curiosity in general. Experimenting with writing gave me a greater appreciation for the process of making meaning from anything—whether it's what we read, see, feel, or learn. It made me feel more empowered to interact with the ideas I studied instead of standing in awe of them and being afraid to probe for deeper implications and complications.

I could go on, but let me stop here and ask a question: why was the eighth grade the first time that someone gave me a meaningful writing assignment? Furthermore, why was it necessary for me to have an exceptionally motivated teacher to give me this chance instead of its being a vital part of the curriculum? How do we expect children who have never been asked to use their own words to express their own thoughts to do well in, let alone enjoy, learning? The lack of creative outlets and creative freedom in the English classrooms I experienced in elementary and high school is tragic and (from my experience and observations) destructive to students' development of critical thinking skills. And, for students going insane from this lack of creative outlet and freedom of inquiry and expression, it makes school a frustrating experience.

Letters

During the summer of my sophomore year at DePauw, I got an e-mail about a program called The Castle. The Castle recruits artists from the Greencastle and the DePauw community and brings them to Fillmore Elementary School and Greencastle Middle School to host

workshops in the arts. I felt something similar to what I'd felt in eighth grade—I think I just felt an opportunity. I'd been complaining about the inefficiencies of the public school system for years without a whole lot of education other than my experience and without really trying to do anything to change it. I sensed a chance to do that.

I had next to no experience working with kids. I had an idea and an itch and Beth Benedix, the coordinator of the program, was kind enough to give me a chance to try my hand at it. I think that my somewhat muted hope was (and is now) that everything I'm doing will give students a chance to have epiphanies similar to the one I had in Mr. Sparks's classroom, or will give them confidence to take the initiative in their own education, or will give them a creative outlet, or will just be fun, or all of the above. In the workshop, all I had to do was give them a fun prompt and have them talk about it. I took them seriously; I sat down with them and asked them very serious questions about their very silly story. They loved it, and I wanted to do something more extended with these fairly abstract and ambitious goals and the result is Letters to Make-Believe.

I run Letters to Make-Believe out of my old elementary school, Central Elementary School. It's about a ten minute drive outside of Greencastle; the majority of the population comes from the rural area around the city. Thus, the school is void of the benefits the Greencastle system reaps from its proximity to DePauw University. A child growing up with creative tendencies has no outlet in the school system; there is very limited arts programming in the area. My program is designed to last through the school year, divided into thematic sections. My original plan was to have it open for grades K-5 for an hour after school one day a week. I have recruited volunteers from DePauw, and feel that there is a lot of potential for a local volunteer base among high school students and parents as well.

I planned to divide the year into four sections to coincide with the four grading periods so that students can sign up for one or all sections. I wanted to allow students and parents to choose what is best for their schedules and allows students who don't hear about the program until the middle of the year to participate. I had planned for each section to have a more specific genre/theme within the umbrella category of fairytales and folklore. The first eight weeks was supposed to focus on character types, the second on monsters and magical creatures, the third on setting and imagery, and the fourth on linguistics and language creation. I envisioned the average day to consist of some warm-up theater games picked to suit the themes of the day, a story, discussion, and a writing activity.

Activities

I planned to choose the theater activities largely from Viola Spolin's *Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook*, which was written for the benefit of the average teacher for the average classroom. The activities are designed to be fun, but also to focus on a particular cognitive/creative concept, for example, the creation of character or generation of place or the use of sound or an awareness of motion. Generating these energies ideally puts kids in a state of mind where they have more of an awareness of these elements in their creations. These are all incredibly helpful concepts to realize in a reading/writing environment and help to flesh out the literary arts by encouraging student involvement with the material and enrichment of the literature's significance by prompting imaginative energies in the kids.

The stories were going to come from a number of anthologies of folk tales or revamped versions of them. In order to cater to the interests of as many children as possible, I developed an archival system with a spreadsheet for each anthology I read. I listed each story with its page number, key words, summary, and story type so that I can search the terms later for matches with

things kids express interest in. For this purpose, at the beginning of each of the four sessions I will pass around a sheet of paper asking the students to list their favorite things: animals, subjects in school they're interested in, favorite character, place in the world they'd like to learn about, etc. Then, I'll search for those terms and match them as well as I'm able. This will be easier if I divide them into smaller groups according to grade, which depends on how many students become involved. I designed this in order to conform with Freire's ideas about student-driven lessons.

This turned out to be a huge waste of time. First of all, the stories in anthologies were almost always pretty dull to get through. They were interesting for me, but reading entire anthologies was a waste of time because many of the stories were repeats, many of them would either be uninteresting or inappropriate for the kids, and because I haven't been able to actually do anything with the system I made. I haven't had the time to work this element into the rest of my plans every week, we usually use different stories, and we don't even always read a story. The reading levels vary so much that alternatives like giving them questions to discuss are more productive. I'm mentioning this now because it isn't even worth bringing up later.

The writing prompts, I planned to come up with myself for the most part until I found a good, innovative source for other activities. The first section consisted of epistolary forms, each day asking the kids to write a letter or an advertisement from the perspective of a certain character. I'm trying to leave it ambiguous enough so that the kids can take ownership of the assignment, yet specific enough so that they aren't completely lost. At the end of each section, I had planned to a public performance where the kids can read their favorite piece of the period. This would allow the kids to showcase their work, would be great advertisement for the program, and would be loads of fun.

Implementing Ethics

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a rejection of traditional approaches to education. The work deals with conventional education politically, discussing it as a function of the oppressor perpetuating the state of oppression. His opening discussion about the culture of totalitarianism, why and how it is continued, and leads into his models of education and dialogic model. In the totalitarian framework, a "duality" is set up "in which to be is to be like and to be like is to be like the oppressor" (48). That is, the oppressed are set up as a dichotomy for the oppressor – because they live in a society of their construction in which their values are the reigning ones, the oppressor is the model after which the oppressed must liken themselves if they wish to improve their lot and yet against which they are defined as the opposite of the ideal. When Freire says, "The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization" (48), he is saying that it is impossible for the oppressed to become liberated within a structure that dehumanizes them; it is paradoxical for a machine designed to disempower one group in order to empower the other to be turned around and empower the disadvantaged group by stripping it of its identity and agency and making it a pale reflection of the dominant group.

Now, this discussion of "revolution" and oppressor/oppressed dynamics seems a little extreme to apply to an elementary school classroom. However, the connection becomes a little clearer when he moves on to talk about the nature of the typical classroom: "A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified" (71).

With this model, it is possible to understand the oppressor as any individual whose role as Subject depends on the role of others as Objects – oppressors can thus be unknowingly oppressors and objects are usually unknowingly objects. I believe these terms are more helpful with less accusatory connotations and so will use them from here on.

And so the teacher narrates the subject matter to the students, an act which places teachers as active subjects and students as passive objects. This one-way process is static and stifling and eliminates the possibility to innovate the relationships either between the Subject and the content, the Subject and Object, or (most importantly for my purposes) the Object and the content. Freire calls this static system of education “the banking model.” Its consequences include:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
 - (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
 - (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
 - (d) the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly;
 - (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
 - (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
 - (g) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
 - (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
 - (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.
- (73)

The banking model of education prevents students from actually thinking, removes their creative, intellectual, and human agency, harms their confidence, and keeps the teacher from gaining anything from the experience except for power and the ability to spread dogma.

He proposes in opposition to this system a dialogic “problem-posing” system. In this system, both the curriculum and the roles of teachers and students become fluid and dynamic: “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and

a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is . . . one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (80). The process becomes rewarding for both parties because the students gain freedom and the teachers gain perspective and the system as a whole is made more effective. The system depends on the teachers taking subjects the students want to learn more about and expanding upon them, thereby connecting the learned material with the students’ reality and making it more likely for them to develop critical thinking skills. It facilitates a more organic and exciting connection with the material than the banking model permits and makes education an ongoing process – “In order to be it must become” (84). The process (learning, thinking) is emphasized over the product (regurgitation of facts).

What Freire fails to mention is how difficult his system is to implement. He says, “The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people” (95). Curriculum consists of what he calls “generative themes,” which are collected from the people and “can be located in concentric circles, moving from the general to the particular” (103). So, what he seems to mean is that a generative theme is a subject which a student wants to learn more about. It is the teacher’s job to make that subject relevant to the class and to expand upon it in a meaningful way that involves both the teacher and the students contributing their perspectives and sources. Difficulties come up when the students might be too young to have been exposed to things they want to learn about or when you have twenty different generative themes for one class. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire is mostly concerned with the ethical necessity of his system and doesn’t give a variety of specific examples of how his system might be implemented and tested for different class settings or different ages.

John Barell works from the philosophical position of Freire, but he focuses on the practical problem posed by the banking system of education: students are being actively discouraged from thinking. In his book, *Developing More Curious Minds*, he talks about ways that educators and administrators can facilitate an environment of organic inquiry – of student-driven classes where the teachers are modeling how to think critically and research, not spew information for students to memorize, so that in effect they become the “teacher-students” and “student-teachers” Freire talks about.

Barell focuses his energy on the importance of asking good questions. Teachers should not only be asking good questions; in fact, according to Barell, that is really one of their secondary goals. They should model good questions and give students the opportunity to find things that interest them, and then they should model proper research methods so that they have the tools to find out what they want to know. Education’s goal should be to facilitate a culture of inquisitiveness – in many cases, it does precisely the opposite. He describes, in essence, a motivation behind Freire’s bank systems: “We are threatened by questions, fearing loss of control of the decision-making process or over the or over the entire situation” which means that “the students’ role is to sit quietly, listen, take in the information, and then someday repeat it in more or less the same form on an answer sheet” (7). He stresses the importance Carl Sagan put on “Wonder and skepticism” (22) in education because they promote openness to novelty, a willingness to take risks, collaboration with others, and empathy with others.

Creativity is important because it stresses both of these values, wonder and skepticism, and encourages a different style of learning, thinking, and communicating. Some of his suggestions for modeling creativity as a valued skill include:

- Setting high expectations,
- Using teacher modeling,

- Sharing our stories,
- Developing positive scripts,
- Creating questions and responses,
- Offering assignments and assessments, and
- Raising the quality of peer interaction. (41)

He provides examples of teachers who implement these strategies and discusses ways of making creativity and inquiry more valued in a classroom setting. For example, he talks about a sixth grade teacher who sits down with her class at the beginning of the year and figures out the goals for the class. This is an excellent example of Freire's concepts being put into practice – and they worked: “Barbara Bald helped her students set personal goals; thus they had more at stake in their own learning” (44). She leveled with her students and engaged in dialogic teaching.

Talking about how we can organize our questions and how we can judge students' progress, he discusses Edward Bloom's Three-Story Intellect: “At Level I we observe, describe, and gather information through all of our senses. This is called the Gathering or Input Phase. At Level II – the Processing Phase – we “process” this data in order to make it meaningful. . . by analyzing, comparing, contrasting, and explaining. At Level III – the Applying Phase – we “apply” what we have learned to authentic situations. We predict, judge, imagine, and evaluate” (63). The Three-Story Intellect model helped me to think of activities that utilize all three levels and hopefully get them to work together.

The biggest idea that came from Barell's book, though, is the importance of asking questions. He listed some responses that fifth graders had to the question: “What makes a good question?” and I include some of my favorite responses below:

“A good question makes you feel good because you feel smarter.”

“Since no one knows the real answer, it is a good question. A good question makes you think!”

“It's good for your body to be curious and to wonder about things. [For example.] ‘Why can't people fly?’”

“I think good questions are questions that are important – questions that make sense - questions that are fun to talk about – questions that you need to know” (60).

These responses are extremely apt – the students get that good questions impact self-confidence, intellectual success, problem solving, and (my personal favorite) that they are fun. On the subject of questions, he says, “Most of us would think that inquisitiveness is, indeed, important. But there hasn’t been much emphasis on including it among the many criteria we think are important to foster, develop, and assess as students learn. We do not seem to make getting better at asking good questions a high priority on evaluations of students’ work” (192). Asking questions is vital for critical thinking, self-directed learning, and for creative production. Evaluating good questions is a way of ascribing value to the process, which should be more encouraged in the public education system.

Critical Reading, Creative Writing, and Theater Games

I started looking into critical reading as a primary goal of my workshop after reading Ryan Bourke’s article, “First Graders and Fairy Tales: One Teacher’s Action Research of Critical Literacy,” in *The Reading Teacher*. His article and Allison Simpson’s “Critical Questions: Whose Questions?” were both excellent models for how I might tie in my own area of study – English Literature – with the program more intimately, as well as giving examples of successful question facilitation and critical thinking development. Furthermore, noting that the concept of critical literacy is often attributed to the work of Paulo Freire (305), Bourke makes social action a primary goal in his curriculum.

Bourke uses the definition as “the act of approaching texts wearing a set of eyeglasses through which the reader examines and questions the familiar and comfortable” (304), and his goal in implementing it in the classroom was to encourage deeper thinking and closer

examination of reality. Hefty goals for a first grade classroom, but by using the medium of fairy tales and modeling reinterpretations of traditional meanings, he was able to help his students make their own adjustments. For example, while his students were at first resistant to feeling sorry for the troll in “Three Billy Goats Gruff,” he was able to retell the story in a way that shifted blame to the father goat, and in “Little Red Riding Hood,” he was able to help his students understand the importance of colors in the description of good and evil. It seemed that he made a lot of progress after he had worked at modeling questions, encouraging the children to do the same, and then given them a chance to reimagine the tales for themselves by having them rewrite the endings.

Allison Simpson also discusses employing critical literacy in elementary school classrooms. Her definition of critical literacy is similar; paraphrased, it is the practice of comprehending information more deeply than conventional understandings and understanding the contexts of information and then applying it to one’s own situation (22). Her approach focused on author intentionality “to help them become more conscious of how texts work upon them and less susceptible to manipulation by what they read and view” (119). She mentions specific critical literacy practices such as:

- Setting questions
- Disrupting the text
- Juxtaposing texts
- Supplying alternative endings
- Role playing, role reversal
- Making insertions and additions (e.g., adding new information or someone else’s version);
- Deleting
- Introducing parody (e.g. highlighting social and cultural assumptions and values through play); and
- Examining the social context (e.g., who wrote it, for whom, when, why?) (119-120)

Her goal is to encourage involvement with the text as “code breakers,” “text participants,” “text users,” and “text analysts,” meaning that she wants them to understand what the work is saying, become involved with the ideas and applying them to other situations, and deciding what they think about what is being said. She tried to do this both with her own questions and by having the kids come up with their own questions – the kids responded much better to their own questions, leading to livelier discussions and lengthier responses (124): “Children’s own interests are the best starting points for engaging them in learning, and as they gain confidence and skill we can gradually nudge them along to consider other textual features and cultural issues” (126). She shares Barell’s value of questions and Freire’s democratic approach to subject generation.

While Bourke asked the questions himself, his last step seems key to me – he says of the assignment, “When my students were granted agency to adjust factions of power, their fairy tale renditions resonated with evidence of critical thinking – thinking that was to extend into other areas of curriculum” (311). While classroom activities and modeling prepared the students for thinking critically and analytically, it seems to me that creative freedom is what helped them put the pieces together and empowered them to apply these skills to other situations.

There are many examples of how critical reading and creative writing are intimately connected – Wendy Glenn goes so far as to say “Prior research tells us that reading and writing are both constructive processes As thought and language are virtually inseparable, it comes as no surprise that the processes of comprehending and composing are similar, if not identical” (10). She goes on to say, “When taught together, reading and writing engage students in a greater use and variety of cognitive strategies than when taught separately. Students not only

achieve better in both areas but also become more critical thinkers, especially when individual, personal responses to literature are promoted” (10).

Glenn goes on to say that writing in schools “gravitates toward limited purpose, audience, and form” (11) and is primarily expository, while creative writing in schools is limited to responding to a specific work in a specific way – such as, rewrite the ending of this story or write from so-and-so’s perspective – instead of allowing the students freedom to create. She argues that creative writing of anything will make stronger readers because they have a better understanding of a work’s mechanics and are interested in author intentionality, which makes the content also subject to skepticism: “Being treated like real writers and having opportunities to actively engage in the process, students developed reading skills with high levels of motivation and authenticity, often seeking out texts likely to serve their needs as authors. They drove their own learning” (18)

Christian Knoeller and James Marshall promote imaginative response as a valid form of literary analysis and outline its benefits for both a richer understanding of literature and inspiration for creative accomplishment. Students showed more personal engagement with creative assignments and personal responses in each study: “Writing imaginatively in response to literary works engages students with a text, enriches their appreciation, and yields valuable insights into interpreting the work. A natural consequence of imaginative response appears to be close and, importantly, focused rereading” (43). Imaginative response could, Knoeller concludes, be used in conjunction with more conventional styles of analysis to Similarly, in Marshall’s study, three different kinds of writing assignments (short answer, analytical, and personal response) were compared, finding “evidence that personal analytic and formal analytic writing had generally comparable effects, in spite of the different kinds of responses encouraged

by the two tasks and in spite of an instructional context which discouraged a personal approach to literature” (58).

Both studies seemed to confirm that creative responses are equally if not more useful than conventional, dictatorial teaching styles. Knoeller found that a multigenre response had the advantages of “(1) engaging and motivating students through variety and choice; (2) appealing to students with a range of interests and abilities through the creativity of such assignments; (3) yielding original insights through rereading and responding to a work repeatedly; (4) making direct connections to textual interpretation through student reflection on their own imaginative writing; (5) enriching classroom discussions of literary works through the expression of multiple interpretations” (47).

Marshall noted that a part of the advantage of teaching writing and reading in conjunction is that both involve “constructive processes” (31); both require creative thinking in order for them to be meaningful for students. The combination of the two enriches the experience of both – as Lori Mayo says in “Making the Connection: Reading and Writing Together,” the reading and writing connection needs to become explicit. As Marshall, Knoeller, Bourke, and many other teachers have discovered, discussion, question-facilitation, reading, and writing depend on each other for a richer experience with ideas and literature.

Psychological Benefits

There were a number of psychological studies done to look at the benefits of creativity among children. Eva Vass conducted a couple of studies which looked at the influence of collaborative creativity on behavior and creative projects. She paid special attention to the value of “emotive content,” such as “musing, acting out, humour, and singing. . . which supported

content generation” (111), recreating emotion for the purpose of creation, creating bonds, and the outside-of-the-box thinking that comes with breaking conventions (2007). Collaboration enhances these emotional responses, which, while nonconventional, “seem to enhance collaborative creativity” (115). She expands on the benefits of collaboration on creativity in a later study, saying that “Collaborative floor was found to be indicative of mutual focus and intense sharing, where the overlaps and interruptions are neither chaotic nor off-putting. . . . When engaged in ripple thinking, ideas build on each other and get more and more rich and complex, expanding in all directions like ripples of water” (201), emphasizing again the benefit that peer relationships can have on creative experience.

Further examining the impact of social engagement on the individual, David Shernoff looks at the benefits of after-school programs versus other activities. Researchers find that “engagement in organized after-school programs fosters enhanced relations between peers and adults and improved social competence among participants” (326). Participants report better experiences with them than in other activities, including a higher chance of flow, “a state of deep absorption in an activity that is intrinsically enjoyable, as when artists or athletes are focused on their performance. The experience is all-encompassing, such that there is no psychic energy left for distractions” (327). Flow is also associated with artistic endeavors and Shernoff says that “The primary conditions for flow consist of (a) a high level of challenge presented by an activity in pursuit of those goals, (b) high skills to meet that challenge, and (c) the activity is regarded as relevant or important” (327). And so after-school activities which are challenging and engaging are likely to be correlated to positive outcomes in social competence and academic achievement.

The last study I want to look at is a creative writing program for HIV positive adolescents called Teens Out Loud. Using the arts in therapy can be an effective tool in recovery; “Petrie,

Fontanilla, Thomas, Booth, and Pennebaker (2004) found that participating in a 30-min emotional writing exercise for four days led to an immediate decrease in viral load and maintenance of a slight elevation in CD4 counts for 6 months after the intervention. Several studies have found that HIV-positive patients who participated in emotional writing exercises demonstrated an immune response that mirrored the effects of antiretroviral therapies” (384). It is interesting here to note that the effects of reading literature and writing poetry had such similar effects, suggesting a relationship between the two.

The group has produced a number of creative products, including a book and a website. “Group members identified four benefits associated with participating in the group: increased confidence, better communication skills, increased support, and a desire to share their experiences with others” (385); another unexpected result was “improved behavior at home and school, as well as improvement in writing skills” (388). This program had the power to impact the kids confidence, social capital, behavior, and writing, just by giving them an opportunity for creative outlet and a supportive atmosphere in which to do it.

Why Folklore?

Researching folklore turned out to be an interesting waste of time. On the one hand, it has several qualities which make it suitable for the goals I want to accomplish: the enabling of the students to feel confident enough to engage in the content, to be interested and excited to learn, to develop inquisitiveness, and to use the study of and engagement in literature to develop methods of analyzing material and channeling curiosity and creativity. On the other hand, these characteristics have more to do with transmission than the lore itself, and so folklore is more

interesting as an example of the kind of storytelling I want to facilitate than as the content of lesson plans.

William Bascom talks about the sociocultural details of folklore, including “who tells them. . . , and who composes the audience; dramatic devices employed by the narrator, such as gestures, facial expressions, pantomime, impersonation, or mimicry; audience participation in the form of laughter, assent or other responses, running criticism or encouragement of the narrator, singing or dancing, or acting out parts in a tale” (281). These elements help explain the usefulness of theater exercises in any English classroom. The nonverbal elements of storytelling change the meaning of the story. Perhaps more significantly, they make the story a dialogue and give the audience a role in tale-creation, which is excellent preparation for writing activities. The social implications of folklore (or literature) help to make the stories real. They make them more relatable, make their lessons applicable, and give students a forum to question and discuss what they mean to them, or just what’s interesting about them.

Audience/narrator dynamics in folklore are mutable – the narrator has the power to choose his delivery, but is constrained by audience expectations and needs and sometimes their active engagement (Luthi, 18; Degh&Vazsonyi). “Running criticism” can be channeled into critical literacy skills, and acting out stories can be a fun and useful activity in story comprehension and re-imagining. Most importantly, though, folklore is an act of communal storytelling, which means that it is designed to work in a setting of collaborative creativity. It is responsive to the needs of both the storyteller and the audience, which is compatible with Freire’s demands on subject matter. This quality makes the nature and material of the stories negotiable; Linda Degh and Andrew Vazsonyi talk about legends, which can include anything

from ghost stories to UFOs, and which the audience can spontaneously take over their delivery to become narrators.

Early Visions

Definition, I realized from the outset, is extremely important. If one has a vague idea about the goals of a certain workshop, the directions will be vague, both you and the kids will be confused. Dividing the year into four sections, would make definition more plausible, would make a narrative arch possible for each section. Folklore is a huge category, and so it needs to be refined into something more focused for kids to be able to fully take advantage of it. I knew that going in and so had divided the year into four tentative parts: characters, creatures, setting, and animals. Because the first section is character-based, I decided that it would be letter-themed. Kids would be corresponding with, or pretending to correspond as, a different character archetype every week. To go along with this theme, I would also pair a story emphasizing this character type and a theater exercise to get them warmed up and in a character-building mindset.

I designed my writing prompts to cater to both what I thought the kids would be interested in and to the types of fairy tales I had read over the summer. I tried to leave them open-ended enough for the kids to make what they wanted of it, but specific enough to give them some direction. The planned prompts were as follows:

- Write a fan letter to your favorite fairy tale character. Make sure to ask questions and to tell them why they're your favorite character.
- Advertisement: You are trying to write a story. The only problem is, you're missing a character. Write an advertisement for the perfect character type to put in the Magical Times.
- Runaway note: You are about to go on a journey, but you don't think your parents will approve. Write a note to them explaining where you're going, why, and when (or if) you will come back.

- Magical helper: You are going on vacation and worry that Cinderella/(insert character) will get into trouble while you are away. Explain where you're going and what they should do while you're gone.
- Ransom note: You're just an ordinary bad guy. You were minding your own business, hiding from the law in a scary forest, when suddenly the clueless hero/heroine of a story stumbles upon your camp. Realizing that you could make some money, you capture them and write a ransom note. To whom are you writing? What are you asking for? What do you threaten to do if you don't get it? (Feel free to be something cool like a goblin, fairy, unicorn, wolf, etc.)
- Love letter: You have just swallowed a love potion and have fallen head over heels for a complete stranger. Write them a love letter, in which you describe who you are and what you love about them. (Ideas: love letter to the villain, love letter from prince to princess or vice versa, love letter to a frog/dragon/horse, love letter to the fairy godmother, etc.)
- Villain: Choose your favorite villain in the stories we've read or from somewhere else. Now, you are that villain. You have just been put in prison for your crimes. Write a letter to your mom explaining what you did and why you did it.
- [Hand out the original fan letters to kids.] You are the fairy tale character in the letter and you've just received fan mail. Respond to their questions and maybe tell a story or two. Maybe you could talk about some of your favorite fairy tales, thinking about the stories we've read so far.

The prompts branched off from my original goal of a character-focused approach. I chose different forms of correspondence was supposed to encourage the kids to think about how their language changed when they were talking to a different audience, to think about how one addresses a group as opposed to an individual, and to think about how a certain character thinks and expresses itself. The first thing that I learned when I actually got there, though, was that few things ever go exactly according to plan.

Surviving Make-Believe: The Implementation

Letters to Make-Believe: Week 1.

They kept coming. Every time I thought the last of them had set up camp, another phalanx had formed in some corner of the gym. The cacophony of little tennis shoes, screams, giggles, and other frightening displays of excessive after-school energy ran unchecked by the few curious stares at the three strangers at the front of the room. We were outnumbered. Clearly, we faced defeat, but all of the teachers had left and we were alone. I had no choice but to step forward and attempt to be heard. It went something like this:

“Hi, guys!” **“Hi, guys.” “GUYS?” “HELLO.” “Hello?” “Would you look at me?” “PLEASE?”**

Let me backtrack a bit. The date is September 12. It is the first day of the program. I have two helpers and think that I will have around fifty children, ages K-5. By the time I arrive at the elementary school, twenty more kids have turned in their permission slips. And so I arrive with three people, four books of fairy tales, a worksheet, and what I had previously thought was a fun creative writing prompt. I was faced with seventy children armed with none of the materials I asked them to bring.

After a herculean effort, I get 70 pairs of eyes looking at me at the same time. Knowing I only have a moment before they revert to entropy, I quickly divide them into two groups: K-2 and 3-5. I took the younger kids by myself and had my helpers take on the older kids as a team. Divide and conquer is a sound strategy; martyrdom is not.

Strategic Evolution

Connor and Quin started out with taking attendance for the older kids. After that, as planned, they played a theater game, circle sound and movement. For this game, the group gets in a circle. The first person steps forward and makes a sound and movement (ex.: wave and says “Hi!”) and then steps back. Everyone else mimics the sound and movement, and then the next person steps forward and makes their own sound and movement. The process is repeated until everyone in the circle has led. I revised it so that the kids say their name and do a movement to make it a name game.

After they finished that game, they got the kids sitting at tables and had them fill out a worksheet I had prepared. The worksheet was intended to get a feeling for the kids’ interests and expectations of the program and to get them in a relaxed, creative state of mind. I’m told that the kids enjoyed the worksheet; the responses indicated varying levels of enthusiasm. After they finished the worksheet, they gathered around Connor to listen to a story about the Russian witch, Baba Yaga. They didn’t seem terribly excited about the writing prompt and the story takes up the remainder of the time.

I did not have quite the same results. Thirty-five children younger than eight sat in front of me. I say sat, but about 60% of them were doing everything *but* sit. Every time I got a small pocket of them to listen, the rest of them broke into chaos. I managed to herd them into what could pass for a circle and tried to shout instructions for the name-game. I did not succeed. Kids were hitting each other, groups were running around the gym, and kids kept telling me that a girl was trying to kiss everyone. Before I could intervene, I had to chase two little boys running laps through the girl’s bathroom. I spent the duration of the hour trying to get them to sit still long enough to tell them a story. I did not succeed; this was pretty much the refrain for that day.

A semester later, I can say without irony that my first day was a terrific success. Terrific, according to the OED, means “Causing terror, terrifying; terrible, frightful; stirring, awe-inspiring; sublime” (“terrific” OED). It’s taken a while for that memory to stop “causing terror” and start inspiring awe; it’s still not quite sublime. Sending a letter to the parents of the kindergarteners through second-graders telling them that they couldn’t come back was humiliating (see Appendix C for correspondence). I felt that my lack of foresight was unforgiveable and tried to remedy that failure for the next workshop, offered this time only to third, fourth, and fifth graders. The goal was to ditch Freire’s quixotic ideals and to create a more controlled environment so that I wouldn’t have to make any more major changes.

The result of this resolve to make a foolproof plan was a series of what I thought of as “experiments.” Translation: every week represented a major change to the program. Some part of me thought for some reason that I could adapt an intensely dynamic process, trying to make the program responsive to successful and unsuccessful tactics, to come to some sort of formula for the perfect workshop. This plan led to a dynamic system that, when functional, looks like an example of Freirean techniques. My changes felt practical, but they are reflective of a dialogic philosophy—being willing to forego complete order for more thoroughly successful techniques. In this system, plans are necessary to frame the hour. Nothing gets done in the midst of complete disorder. But the plans need to be mutable, and they need to be risky sometimes to figure out what works.

Everything about my plan for the week following the first week was ambitious:

OUTLINE FOR THURSDAY, 9/26

- *Warm-up and story (and snacks): 15 minutes*
 - *1. Energies in connection with character types.*
 - *How does a bad guy move? How does a fairy move? How does a knight move? Princess? Frog? Etc.*
 - *2. Yes, and...*

- 3. *Group storytelling*

BREAK INTO ROTATING GROUPS! Breaking them into groups by grade; they're roughly equal and will be more comfortable with that.

- *Worksheet: questions about what they think about stereotypical characters: 15 minutes*
 - *Discussion of their thoughts about characters*
 - *Have them draw a picture of the perfect villain/magical helper/hero/heroine/princess/fairy/etc.*
- *Theater activities: 15 minutes*
 - *Occupation game*
 - *Whose Line Style Interviewing*
 - *Group story telling (if don't get to it at beginning)*
- *Writing activity: 15 minutes*
 - *Advertisement: You are trying to write a story. The only problem is, you're missing a [choose from: hero/heroine, prince/princess, witch, evil stepmother, villain, monster, magical helper, magical trouble maker, etc.]. Write an advertisement for the perfect character type to put in the Magical Times.*
- *Closing activity: Charades or another story (until 4 if we need more fillers)*

I planned to cram seven activities into the space of an hour as well as reading a story, getting the kids organized into rotating groups, and explaining each activity. I include this in full so that the reader can really get a sense of how absurd this expectation was. I wanted to avoid the chaos of my first workshop, and so to make up for it, I tried to structure every second of the time I spent with the kids. I wanted to leave absolutely no room for anyone to get the idea into his head that it might be funny to run laps through the school trailing a stream of glitter.

Hanna T. 3F.

Letters to Make-Believe: Week 2

What's your favorite kind of character? Are they funny, smart, pretty, brave, wicked?

Merida she is pretty and funny to

What kind of character is Jack Frost? Hero? Bad guy? Magical mischief-maker?

Bad guy

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a hero?

helpful to help with homework but tell me answers.

If a hero were an ordinary guy, what job would he or she have?

Clean dog doo

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a villain?

To bite into

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a princess?

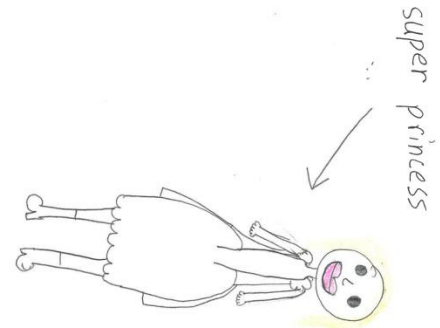
Be proper princess

You're in trouble. You need some sort of magical help, and suddenly someone appears. Who is it and what are they like?

Merida sometime get her way.

You're going on a long trip and you need a sidekick. You can choose anyone in the world – who do you choose and why? (Feel free to make them up.)

Myrtles will be my sidekick



These are some of the responses I got during week 2. As you can see, the most complete activities were the worksheets. The writing prompts that had anything on them at all only had a line or two, with one or two exceptions. I got some cool illustrations of sidekicks, though.

Elena E.

Letters to Make-Believe: Week 2

What's your favorite kind of character? Are they funny, smart, pretty, brave, wicked?

Ariel she is smart, pretty

What kind of character is Jack Frost? Hero? Bad guy? Magical mischief-maker?

Magical mischief-maker

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a hero?

fly, strength, invisible, invincible, nice

If a hero were an ordinary guy, what job would he or she have?

Bank

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a villain?

mean, weird, poopy

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a princess?

pretty, nice

You're in trouble. You need some sort of magical help, and suddenly someone appears. Who is it and what are they like?

super princess pretty, nice, fly, invincible

You're going on a long trip and you need a sidekick. You can choose anyone in the world – who do you choose and why? (Feel free to make them up.)

super princess she is great



Letters to Make-Believe: Week 2

What's your favorite kind of character? Are they funny, smart, pretty, brave, wicked?

Wicked. Robin is my favorite

What kind of character is Jack Frost? Hero? Bad guy? Magical mischief-maker?

Magical mischief-maker.

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a hero?

Personality traits.

If a hero were an ordinary guy, what job would he or she have?

Well probably it will eat like a human not like a hero.

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a villain?

Well that probably would have some pretty weird actions.

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a princess?

hmm I don't know.

You're in trouble. You need some sort of magical help, and suddenly someone appears. Who is it and what are they like?

Jack Frost. So he protects that person who was being a jerk.

You're going on a long trip and you need a sidekick. You can choose anyone in the world - who do you choose and why? (Feel free to make them up.)

A creep man.

Jack Frost keeps coming up because we'd just read Chris Van Allsburg's The Stranger, which sparked some discussion of the movie The Guardians.

I was trying to make up for my own lack of focus as much for the kids, though. I could explain the importance of each activity. Having the theater warm-up activities was supposed to give them a sense of the different moods associated with characters. The different I mentioned refer to potency, buoyancy, and radiancy, (Lessac). Potency describes a slow, thick movement associated with deliberation, power, sensuality, or a number of other applications; buoyancy is moving as if floating, useful to convey being dazed, drunk, carefree, etc.; radiancy involves quick, fast movements and can be associated with excitement, insanity, extreme agitation, etc. I thought that they would be useful because they would emphasize the nuances you can apply to an emotion to portray a certain character type.

Yes, And... is a game where player one asks a question, and player 2 answers "Yes, and..." and then asks a question of their own. The process is repeated. This game can be used to create an atmosphere of supportiveness. I thought it would be useful because it creates a rhythm

that gets a pair used to working together and building on the other's work. This was to prepare for the group storytelling which we ended up skipping to get to the story and the snack.

After this, we split approximately twenty-five children between the three leaders we had there, with each of us hosting a different station. Moving them around was supposed to promote energy, while keeping them in groups was supposed to promote order. My group conducted a game of charades, Conner gave her group a worksheet, and Quin had them write their advertisements and draw pictures. The plan was to have them rotate so that all of them could do each of the program, but we ended up only having time for one station each. This would have been fine, but some of the kids doing the worksheet wanted to do the theater activity, and some doing the theater activity wanted to color, and so on. It wasn't fair to have them doing different things and having all three things going on at once was chaotic. The hallways remained glitter-free, but no one had the chance to have much fun either.

In order to get anything done, I had to build in a lot more time for the kids to get oriented. The point was not to cram as many activities into the hour as I could to address as many perspectives as I could. It is a lot more effective to really focus on one or two activities. This way, kids have a chance to give input, they don't have to feel rushed, and half the time isn't lost in the scramble to get to the next activity. Having too many things going on at once, in this instance and in most instances since, is a distraction, not a stimulus.

For the next time, I scheduled time for a bathroom break and attendance. Then, we played a brief warm-up game and went straight into the story instead of having the warm-up take up half the time as it had last time. After the story, we divided into three groups, this time all doing the same thing. Because only a third of the kids had written advertisements the prior

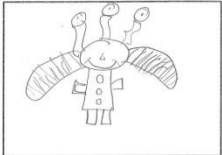
week, I adjusted that into a template where there were boxes for drawings and spaces for descriptions of their advertisements. I showed them an example and they went to work.

NAME: Katie N.

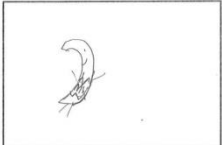
Make-Believe Classifieds!

You're trying to write a story, but you lost all your characters! Put up ads in the Make-Believe Times so that people can apply for the job.

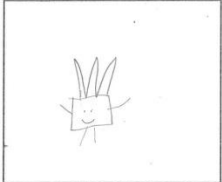
Monster!
He is super mean.
He has 3 eyes and
big ears! He's evil.



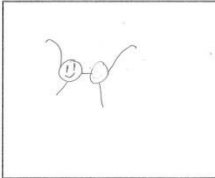
Goaty
To eat my
vegetables.



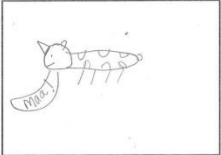
Bob the Cheese
Sherd!



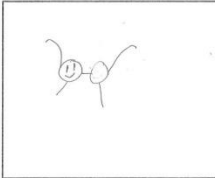
Sally the plant



Macaroni Woman
To save Bob
the Cheese
Sherd!



See-See



and M. Y. N. Wrighting Workshop


10/2/13

NAME: Allie S. 3M


Make-Believe Classifieds!

You're trying to write a story, but you lost all your characters! Put up ads in the Make-Believe Times so that people can apply for the job.


This macaroni is
the spiciest thing
I can find at all.
He can crawl up
walls like a spider
he can talk in the
night but men
don't know he's there.




Masked Spy



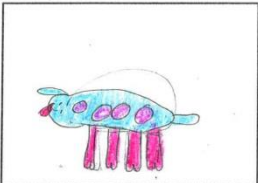
She needs a dress,
shoes, earrings and
her hair up.



The dog needs to
bark and sleep.



She lives in the
ocean with the fish



Cute, right?

This format worked a lot better—it was less frenzied on all accounts, students had time to talk about what they were drawing, and they had the choice to focus on writing or drawing, either one of which would get them in the process of character-formation. The kids in my group spent a lot of time discussing what they were doing with the other kids. While this meant that a lot of what they came up with didn't end up on paper, it also showed that they were invested in the material.

By this point, I had abandoned the idea that my writing prompts would go over smoothly without major revision. I had also learned that success highly corresponded to having a confident idea of how to organize the hour. When planning for the next week, I tried to accommodate the fact that the writing prompt was not the most important part of the hour if the kids weren't interested in it. We read *Circus Girl* by Jack Sendack, which is about a circus girl running away to explore a city. I chose that story because it had a lot of potential to reverse expectations for what is normal, and I hoped that it would get kids thinking about point of view.

After the story, we asked the kids questions about what kind of adventure they would go on. Originally, we were going to have them compile a list of things that they would take on a journey; my volunteers informed me before we left that this sounded boring and confusing. Instead we went with the back-up plan: my volunteers and I wrote fun words related to journeys/adventures on scraps of paper. We each took a stack and put it in the center of our circle of kids. Each kid took a turn pulling a scrap of paper and incorporating it into the story. It worked beautifully. My group boarded a runaway train flying to another planet and then crashed it back to the earth because a renegade giraffe took it over. They worked together really well and their creativity fed on the energy to keep the story going in a way I hadn't seen happen with the writing prompts so far.

Letters to Make-Believe: Week 4

You're running away! Write a note to your parents explaining why you're leaving, where you're going, and what you plan to do there.

I am leaving to Ponyland I left cause
you don't give me chocolate for life.
I was bored and ponies make me happy.
I renamed myself happy pony. I made 0
friends but still you know what I'm
sayin dog.

Love, happy pony fist bump homie.

Signed (your name and grade): Ryan L 4-n

Letters to Make-Believe: Week 4

You're running away! Write a note to your parents explaining why you're leaving, where you're going, and what you plan to do there.

Dear Mommy
I am running away, I am joining the
circus because I want to be a clown/
acrobat. I want to fly through the
air, and I want to entertain kids,
and get my face painted. I
want to entertain everybody, I
want to swing through the air.

Signed (your name and grade): Kimberlee 3rd grad

Letters to Make-Believe: Week 4

You're running away! Write a note to your parents explaining why you're leaving, where you're going, and what you plan to do there.

I am running away to
go to horror land to
go find my new baby
zombie. My zombie isn't
violent like most zombies
are. I know you guys might
be scared but I am going
to raw raw restaurant
because I want to
eat raw chicken so I
can die and turn into
a zombie.

Signed (your name and grade): Kaylea Heagy 3P

Letters to Make-Believe: Week 4

You're running away! Write a note to your parents explaining why you're leaving, where you're going, and what you plan to do there.

Dear Mom,
Hello!! I'm leaving because
Dora told me to go
on TV with her. I'm going
to Mexico! Ohtepos. I went
through TV travel!! I hope
you will keep reading.
Dora and boots are
stupid! I'm sorry I cooked
Dora! I will eat Mexican
for my whole life!
she has had her last
episode! Bye! Bye!

Signed (your name and grade): Katie R. 4-N

While my group didn't get to the writing prompt, the other groups did. There was a lot more of an enthusiastic response in the writing itself, which I think can be attributed to doing the oral storytelling activity first.

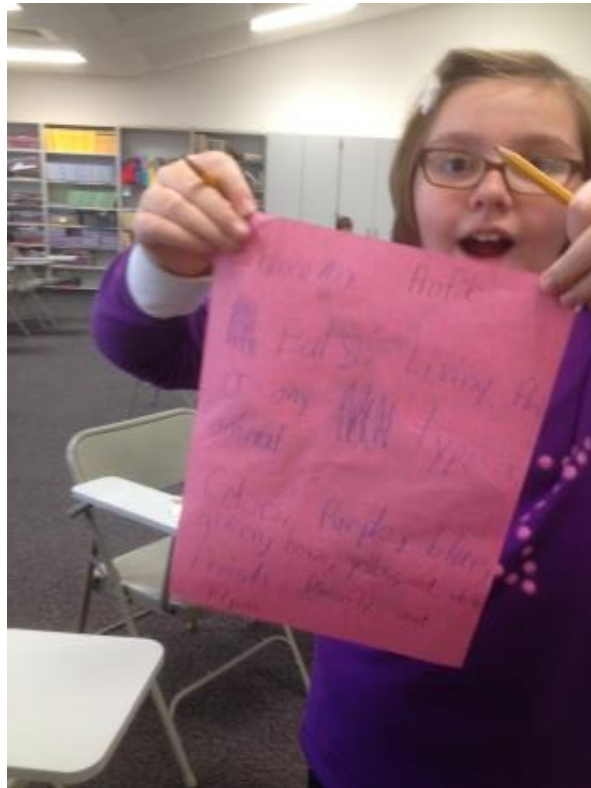
Letters to Make-Believe: Week 4

You're running away! Write a note to your parents explaining why you're leaving, where you're going, and what you plan to do there.

I am a boy because I want to
 live in the future. I am a boy
 who is 1922-1981, now I am
 91 years old. I am a boy who
 is a boy, I am a boy who is a boy.

Signed (your name and grade): Joshua B. 4-B, 10-10-13

In an attempt to redeem my character theme, I told them the story of Frankenstein, with a few tweaks for the last day of this section. In my version of Frankenstein, the monster ran away to found a home for other misunderstood creatures, explicitly reversing the roles of monster and hero (as the original story does, but as many of the popularized versions that I figured the kids would be familiar with do not) to stimulate discussion of what makes a monster and what makes a hero.



I also wanted to introduce my monster section; some of the most famous monsters (mermaid, sphinx, griffin, etc.) are just mash-ups of other, more familiar things. So, having them mash up their own Frankenstein-esque creations was a fun way of getting them engaged with the story, and they had fun. This activity was supposed to get them thinking about the physical nature of monsters as animals and to emphasize that we can make monsters out of anything—even a butterfly. I brought in cut-outs of animals and invited the kids to cut them up and put together their own creations to join Frankenstein's monster in exile. The kids had a lot of fun with this activity and we had some very interesting monstrous creations, some of which still grace my fridge.

Letters to Make-Believe: MONSTERS!

By the time we got around to the second section, I was well-accustomed to the constant need for revision. The design of this unit was self-consciously experimental. I wanted to get a feel for what structures, content, and activities the kids responded to. I needed to rediscover my goals, which meant that I would have to abandon some of the goals I had superimposed upon the program before having any experience. This unit was the perfect place to experiment because it was really short—it only lasted for five weeks.

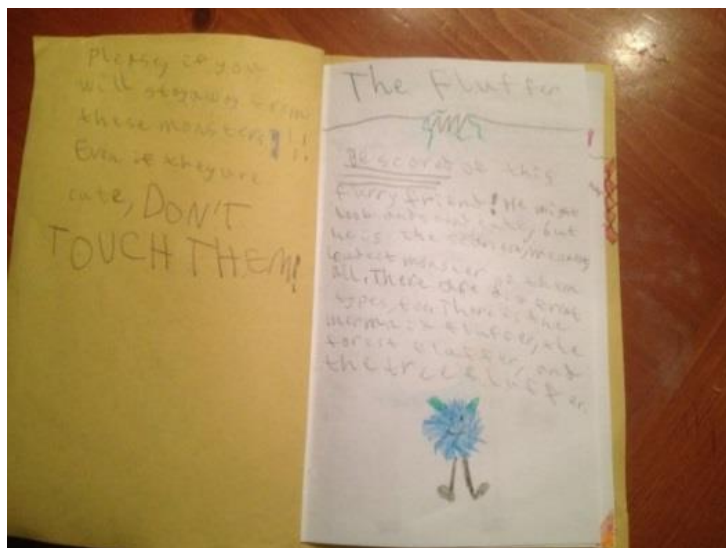
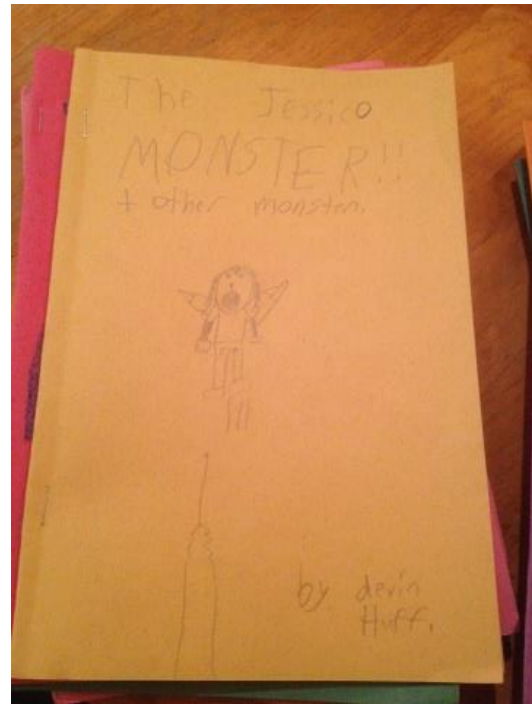
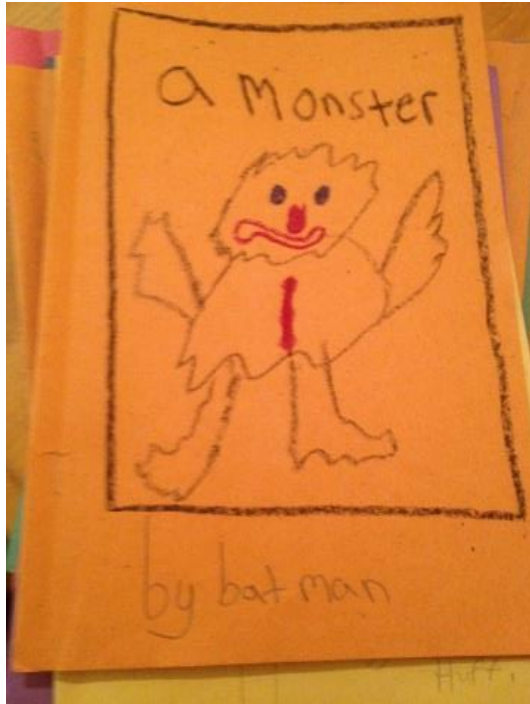
The first week, I wanted to address the reluctance that most of the kids seemed to have for actually writing. I still wanted them to be thinking about the material and to have creative input, and so I focused more on giving them chances to talk. I divided them into groups before doing anything else this time so that everyone would have more of a chance to talk. We started out by asking their names and why they joined the program. Then, we informed them that the school had been invaded by monsters.

As a way of speculating what might be out there, we had them write down monsters they knew about. We used these to play monster charades and it worked beautifully. First of all, because the leaders were participating as well, it made us their peers, people they could be comfortable and have fun with. Second, it gave the kids to move around, think about the differences among monsters, and for the kids to describe the monsters that they knew and the rest of the group didn't. This last effect also served as an equalizer. Finally, it was a nice lead-in to the group storytelling activity because it got everyone used to building on others' contributions and thinking on their feet. The oral storytelling activity worked nicely for many of the same reasons. It didn't turn out exactly as described above, but the fact that we were spontaneously creating a story made it less intimidating, I think. They liked working together and being silly, but they also came up with some pretty inventive stories.

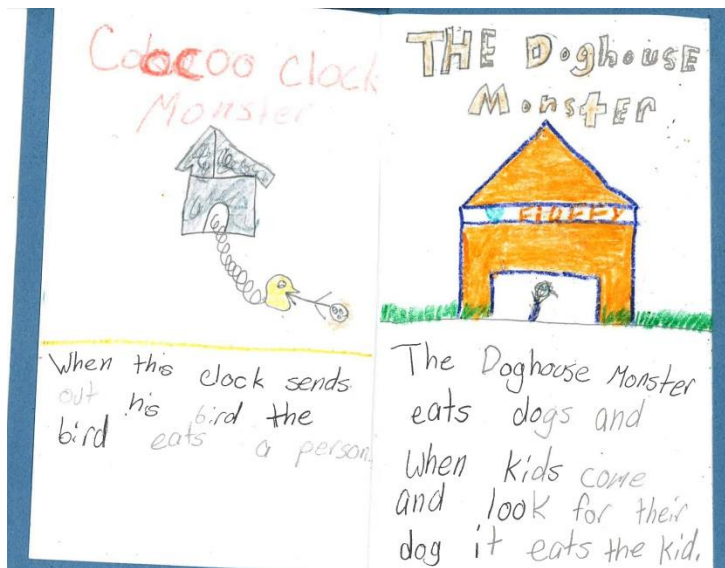
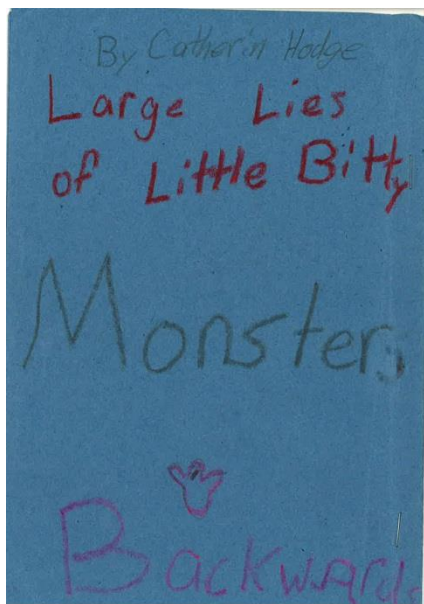
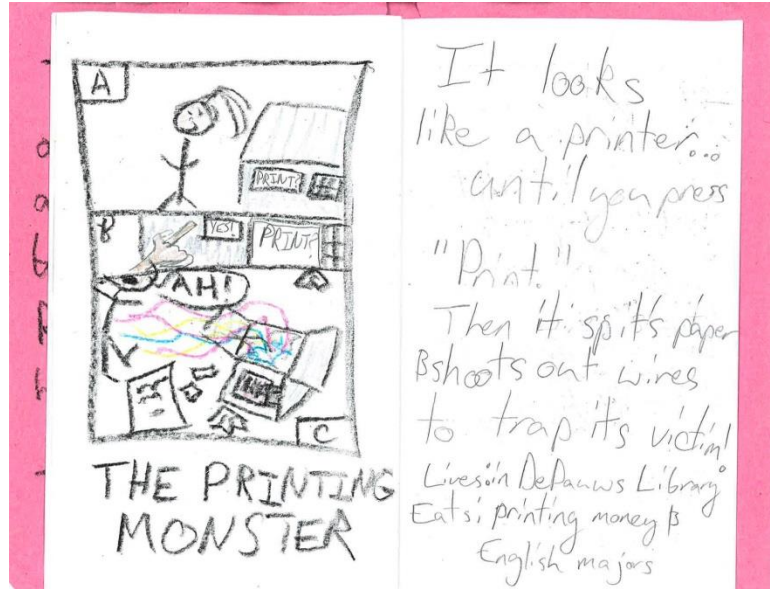
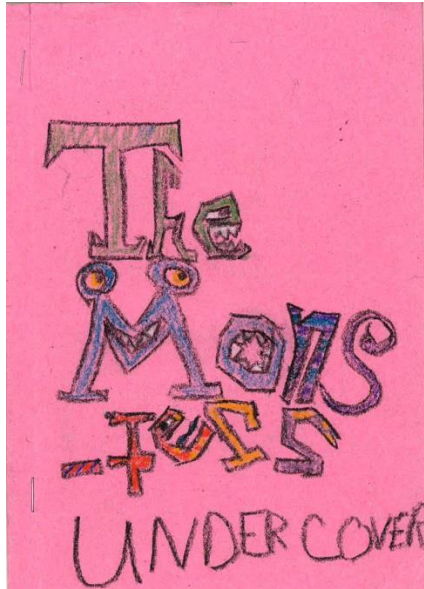
Because of the first week's success, I was willing to go out on a limb and see how they responded to a different form: poetry. I read them Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwock" and Shel Silverstein's "Don't Bump the Glump," which didn't leave much of an impression (which is fair—they certainly weren't his best). Then I gave them scrambled poems to descramble as a group. They did not enjoy descrambling the poems. They worked together alright, but the energy levels plummeted and the activity began to feel arbitrary. I was hoping to get them to see the clues that poetry gives us for what goes where, looking for rhymes and what makes sense, but everyone just wanted their piece to go on the paper next. We didn't get to the final activity, which was fine because it was vague and not well-orchestrated. The only thing they seemed to like was being able to read the poems aloud themselves. The day involved very little creative input from the kids, which makes it a failure.

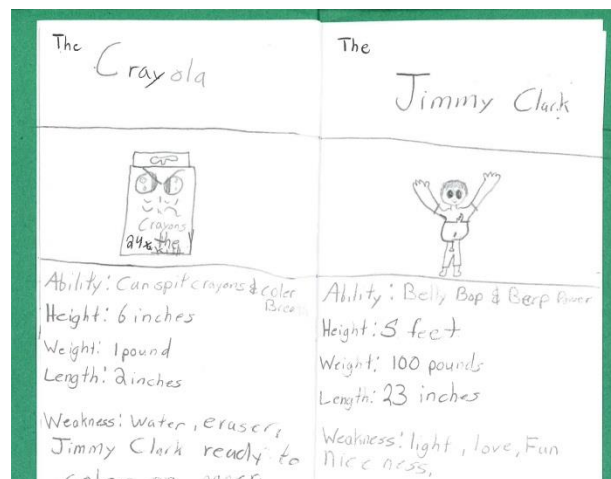
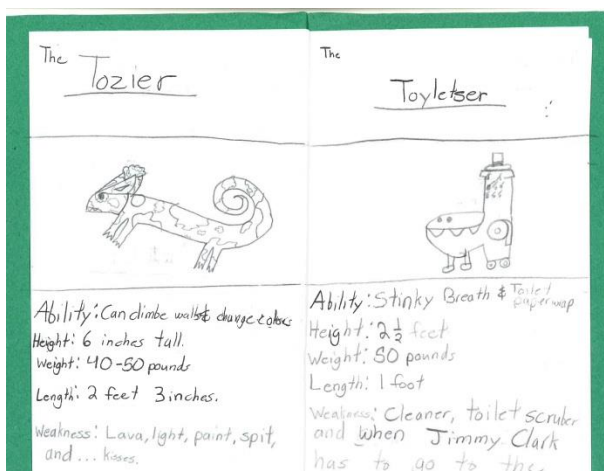
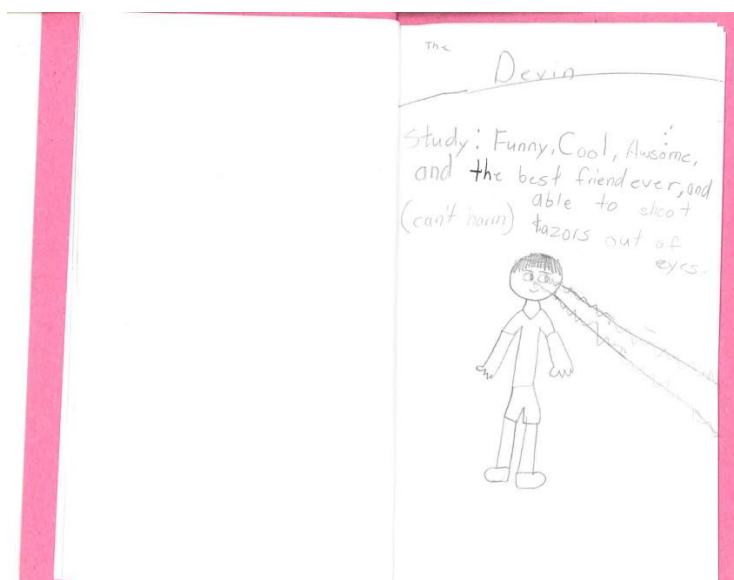
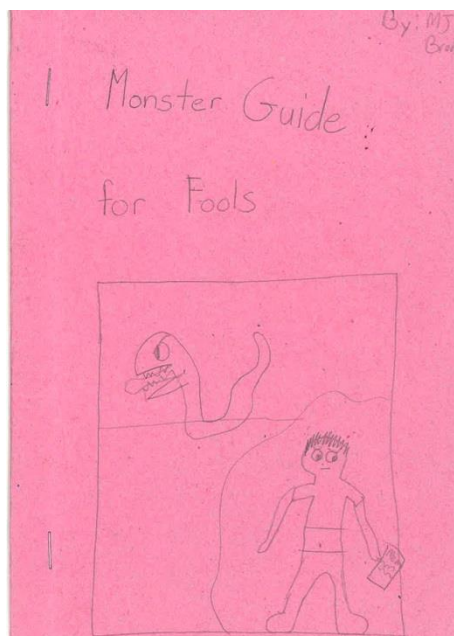
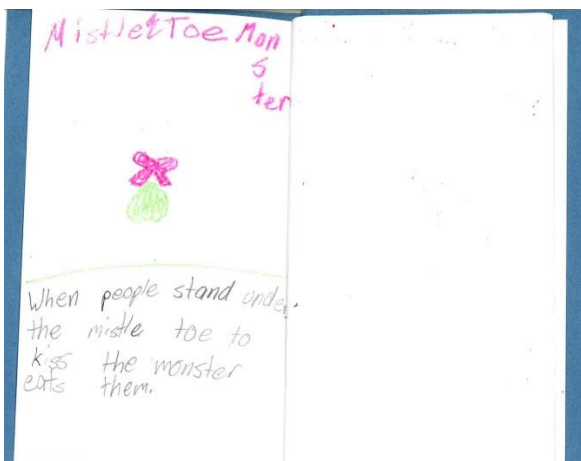
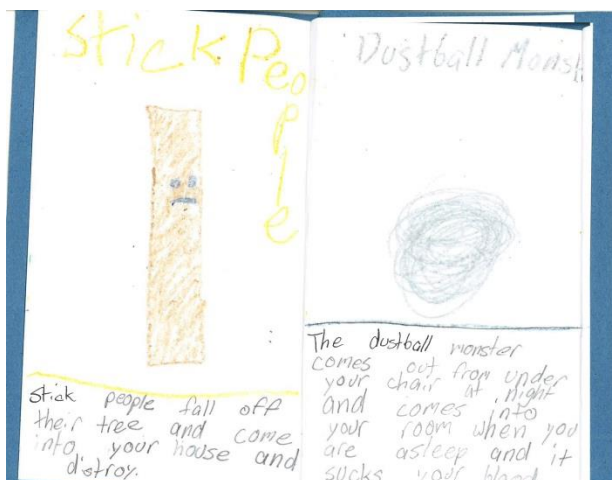
I think that poetry needed much more of a preface than I gave it. I would need to approach each part of it much more deliberately. This week really brought home again the level of inexperience I have with teaching. I should not have expected to be able to have one or two lead in activities and then have them not only writing poetry, but enjoying it. I am not by any means saying that this is impossible—I just didn't do it well. I'm not comfortable enough with it to do it well, not yet. If I were to try poetry with the kids again, I think that I would want to observe some classes teaching poetry, some workshops, and to read a lot more quality children's poetry. Then, I would devote an entire unit to poetry instead of just one day. As such, I haven't tried it since.

The following two weeks, I tried to make up for the creative freedom I had annihilated the previous week. I put together "Monster Books" out of construction paper and printing paper. I made a sample book of monsters that looked like ordinary things, like the Scarf Monster and the Printing Monster (a tribute to Roy O West). When we got there, I read "The Book that Eats People," showed them my sample book, and then had them make books of their own where they reveal the nefarious attributes of everyday items. They loved this. Some of them produced more than others, but overall, there was a high level of engagement and lots of excited discussion about what they were making; some kids asked me for extra books to make extra monsters.

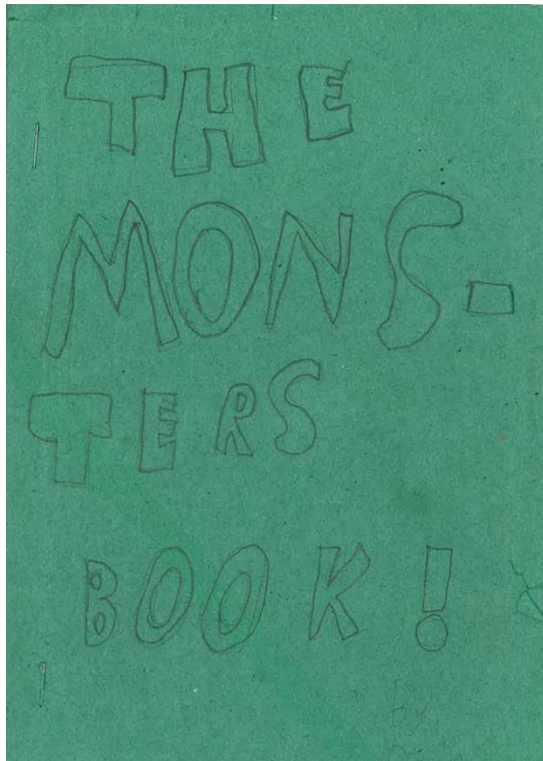


These three pictures are poor quality because I took them at the school; I just really had to make sure that Batman(alias, Logan) and the Fluffer (courtesy of my sister) made it into this. The following pictures are scans of other monster books. The first two are my own examples and the kids did the rest.

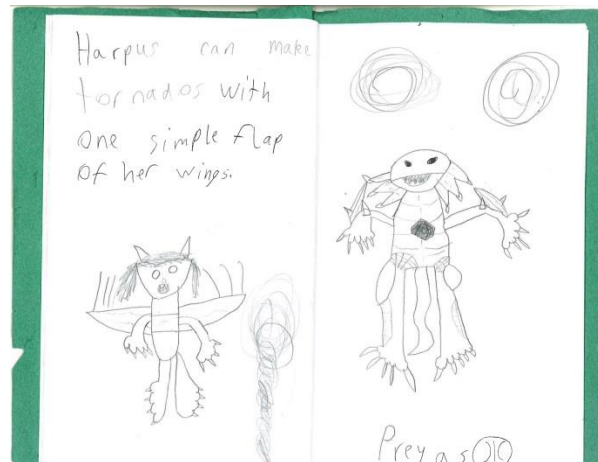
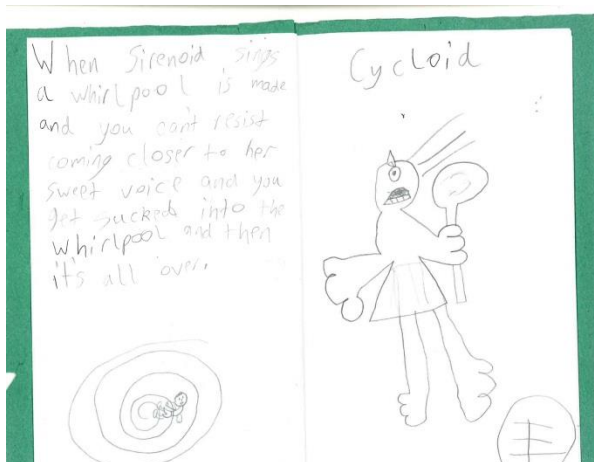




Not all of the kids produced as much material as these examples did, but everyone seemed really engaged; most of the ones who didn't get as much written down didn't because we ran out of time. To give them more time and to capitalize on a successful idea, I duplicated it the following week with a few adjustments.. I compiled a dictionary of real monsters and had each group go through it. The dictionary itself was flawed because I got the descriptions from sources that weren't age-appropriate. The material wasn't inappropriate, but in many cases the language went over their heads. I adapted the entries where I noticed this, but I think this contributed to its failure. The activity itself, making our own monsters based on the ones already in mythology was moderately successful, but a lot of kids had trouble thinking of more monsters. I think that for it to have worked, I would have had to modify the activity or brought in actual stories about monsters instead of trying to cover as many monsters as I could. I think that the "dictionary entry" style turned them off—the narrative value or the voice would have had to be better to get them excited.

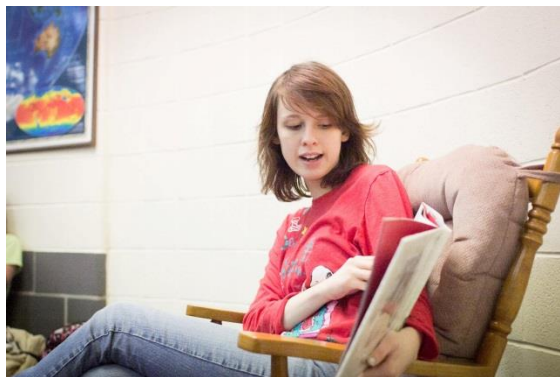


I have so many of these monster books in here because it was the single most successful activity I had. They really loved it and I think they came up with some good stuff.





For the final week, we did something special. First, I had them fill out exit surveys, which I will include in full in my reflection section, asking them about things they liked or didn't like about the program and for suggestions for the next unit. I had them vote on a theme for the unit, and the result was the current spy-themed Decoding Make-Believe. After this, we read a Christmas story about how Santa got his job. I used this to lead into our activity: Franken-elves. The idea had come from collaborating with the DePauw Student Arts Council: use Christmas materials (wrapping paper, tinsel, and bows) to make monster elves. This rounded off the monster unit nicely because it brought us back to the idea of what makes a monster. I told them that Frankenstein had taken over the North Pole and needed to make some elves. Two members of the Arts Council, Lauren Arnold and Thuy Anh Nguyen, had come to help us out with the craft. (The photos below are all credited to Thuy.) They were excited to have visitors and they had a lot of fun reinterpreting Christmas. MONSTERS ended on a successful note.



Reading about how Santa got his job.



Lauren heading a table of monster-makers.



Israel, Katie, Ava, Chloe, and Hannah



MJ Brooks



Discussing Santa's career prospects.



Quin and MJ working on their Frankenelves.



Allie Stelzner



Devin Huff



Devin and MJ



Katie Newtown

Decoding Make-Believe

This brings us to Letter's to Make-Believe's final variation for the year: Decoding Make-Believe. I was particularly excited to begin this unit because (a) the vote for this theme was nearly unanimous and (b) the theme is absolutely crawling with possibilities for fun applications to English and Literature. After all, language is a code. As I explained to the kids yesterday, the word "cookie" is not actually a "cookie"—it's like the classic example of Magritte's "This is Not a Pipe." It isn't—it's a picture of a pipe. Humans interpret raw information as a series of codes at the most basic levels.

To push a little further, what are writers and literary critics but detectives, backwards and forwards? A detective uses deterministic emplotment to read clues; they start at the beginning

and work back. A writer starts with the beginning and leaves clues on the way to the end; a detective reconstructs the story from clues. Every time we use clues to explain something, we are detectives constructing a narrative. People make narratives of everything—history, science, biography: all of these (to a greater or lesser degree) narratives come from asking the right questions and putting events and facts in the right order. In a way, taking this as my theme is an implicit defense of the literary arts as one of the most vital ways we have of experiencing life in general.

I have a few key elements to stress. The first point is that mysteries are just backwards stories. Codes come next: first, learning to crack them and then learning to write them. From there, we look at alternative codes: codes in art, stories, and behavior. We focus on a specific set of skills: sharpening deductive reasoning, expanding on code-reading capabilities, and using these skills to work on story-making. At the time this thesis is due, we will still be wrapping up these activities and so I cannot give a full account of the results, but I will include here a more detailed outline of the semester.

The first day served mostly as an introduction to the unit. I forgot to send out a reminder, and so only half of the students attended, but it still went pretty smoothly. Most of the volunteers I had with me were new, and so the smaller number of kids helped get them acclimated. The structure remained pretty similar to previous units, but included more flexibility in the times and built in more discussion time.

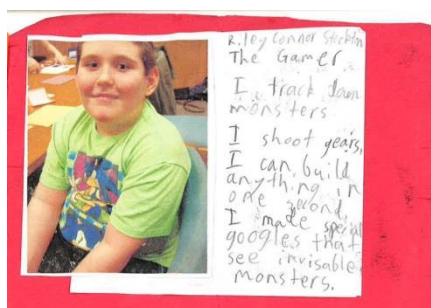
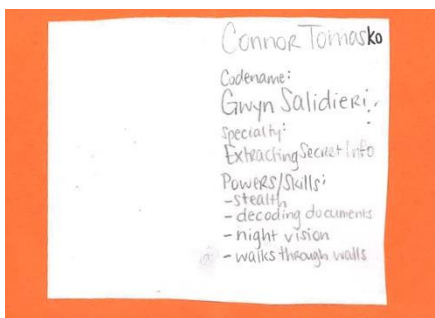
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- 3:00-3:05: Attendance and bathroom break
- 3:05-3:30: Discussion (and maybe story)
 - Focus on what it means to be a detective. Talking points:
 - Famous detectives

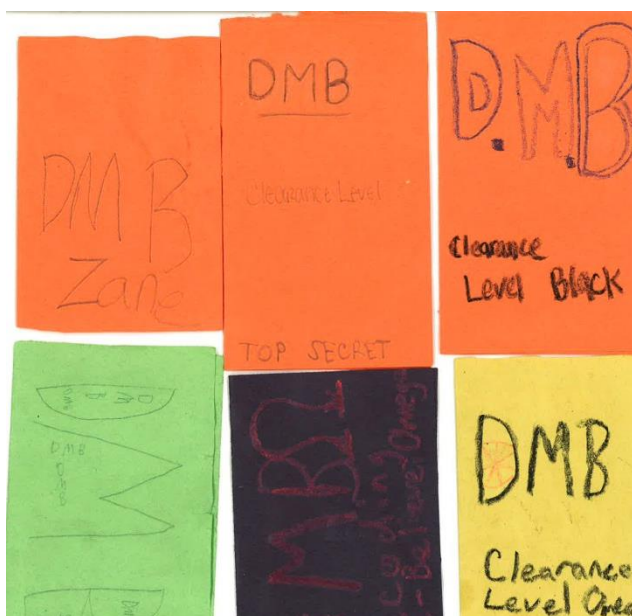
- *What do detectives do? How do they do it? What do they look like? What do they act like? Whom do they work for? What kinds of things do they detect?*
- *Connections between detective work and storytelling*
 - *What are the parts of a good story? What are the parts of a good case? How are they similar? How are they different? Where does a writer start? Where does a detective start?*
 - *For example, a writer starts at the beginning and works toward the end; the detective reconstructs the beginning by working backward from the end*
 - *Talk to them about how making a story clues: does it make sense? So what does that make these clues? Evidence? Or just building blocks for story? What other kinds of clues do we have? How do you know that it's true? Talk about Sherlock Holmes. People make EVERYTHING a story.*
 - *If we have time for a story, make it a debriefing about our detective agency*
- *3:30-4:00: IDs and casebooks*
 - *Then inform them that we're making our own secret agent company. We have to decide what kind of agency we are; we can specialize in all sorts of different things (as in each kid can be a specialist of a different area; give them examples).*
 - *Our activity: making our ID cards and beginning our case books with a description of what kind of detective each of us is, what we specialize in, maybe some superpowers if we want, etc. That'll be the first page of the casebook. I'll collect them and pass them out every day to take attendance.*
 - *If we have time, transition into logic puzzles and have them solve a "case". Explain how to do them, make sure that there are "cases" for them to solve on the front and a graph for them to solve it on the back. Then have them write out a "case study" (encourage creative license) for our collective "files" and if we have time, present each case to the small group (table) they're at. Have volunteers take pictures or videos of the presentations.*

The focus on discussion here was a new phenomenon for the program. I'd made half-hearted attempts before, but discussion has been a key part of the last few weeks. The kids are all eager to participate. This can make it difficult to stay on task and to move on to activities, but it really is important to let them have a voice. This is one of the main aspects of classroom culture I want

to change, and I think it's working, at least in this afterschool context. Moreover, they often do stay on task and have good, insightful answers.



These are some of our casebooks, including mine and one of my helper's. Ava's (below) text box is obscured. Ryan is the picture directly above.



The activity also worked out pretty well. I think a part of its success came from the variety it allowed. Kids more interested in coming up with cool detective stuff could spend as much time as they wanted constructing their character and writing a story about them while kids who prefer drawing had plenty of things to decorate and time to draw their profiles. I modeled the casebooks after the monster books as a place for them to collect all the activities over the semester. I'm hoping that this will make them feel like they have an impressive product that came out of the program. I took the kids pictures and put them in their IDs the next week, which most of them seemed to appreciate.

The next week, we had about twice as many kids because so many people missed the previous week. I divided the kids into two groups with leaders conducting different activities. This made planning activities a little more complicated than usual:

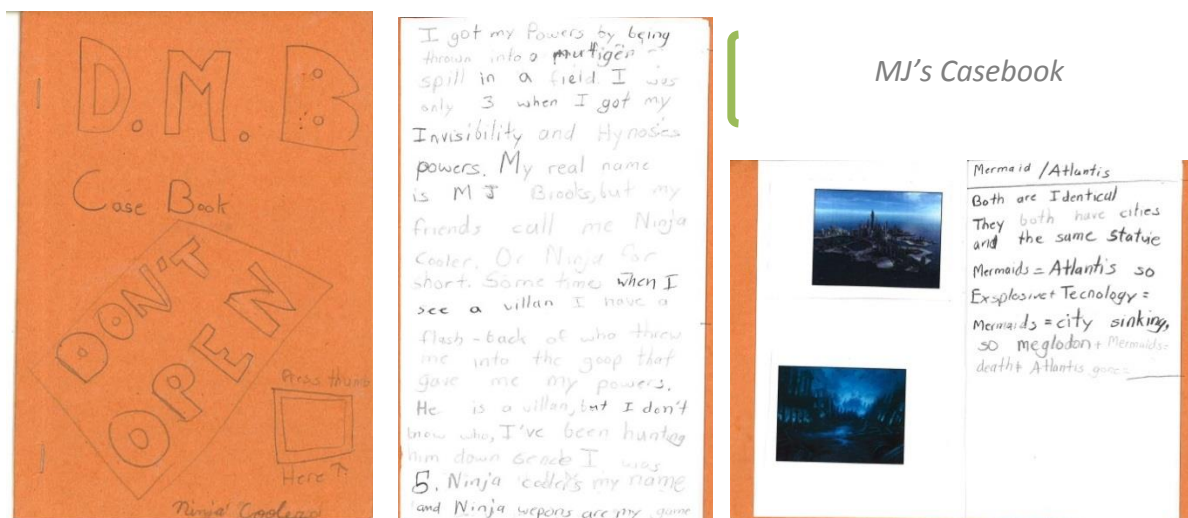
Decoding Make-Believe:

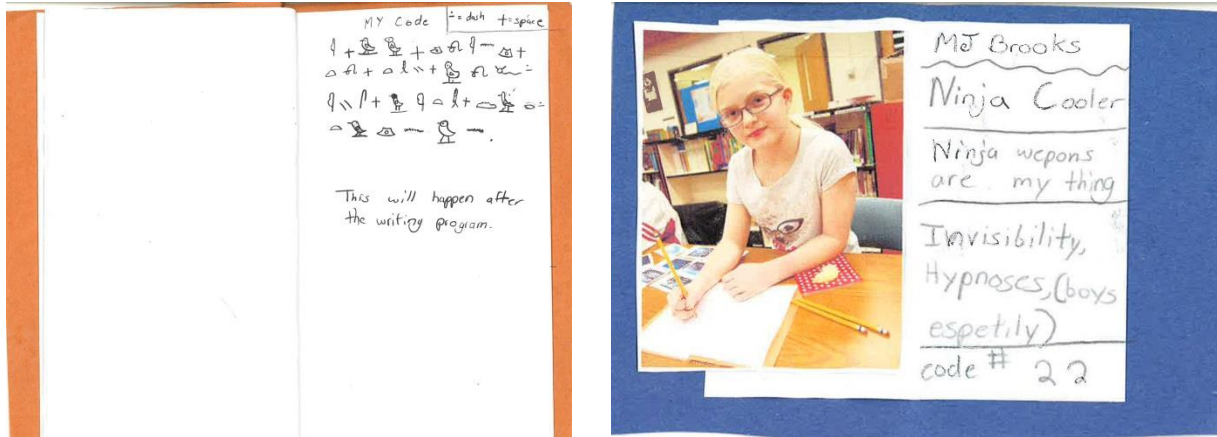
Week 2

- 2:30: Meet in the front area of Roy O West
- 2:40: Arrive at Central Elementary School
- 3:00-3:10: Attendance, housekeeping, bathroom breaks
- 3:10-3:30: Break into two groups.
 - Group 1: Leader takes kids **who attended last week** into the reading circle. Have an opening discussion about plot, leading them toward the ways in which solving a mystery is similar to and different from a normal story. (In a regular story, you begin with an introduction: you know the characters and the situation, but you don't know what's going to happen. For a mystery, the plot runs in reverse: you have the conclusion, but don't know how it happened. So you read clues to figure out the who, the what, the where, when, and other pertinent questions that the author answers for us in a regular story.) After this, the leader will read the first chapter of *Encyclopedia Brown* with them and give them logic puzzles. Explain those and their connection to deductive reasoning, and have them work on that until the other group is ready to meet up again.
 - Group 2: Group 2 will get a quick recap of last week, reading the letter from "The Boss," making their DMB identity badges, and receiving their case books.

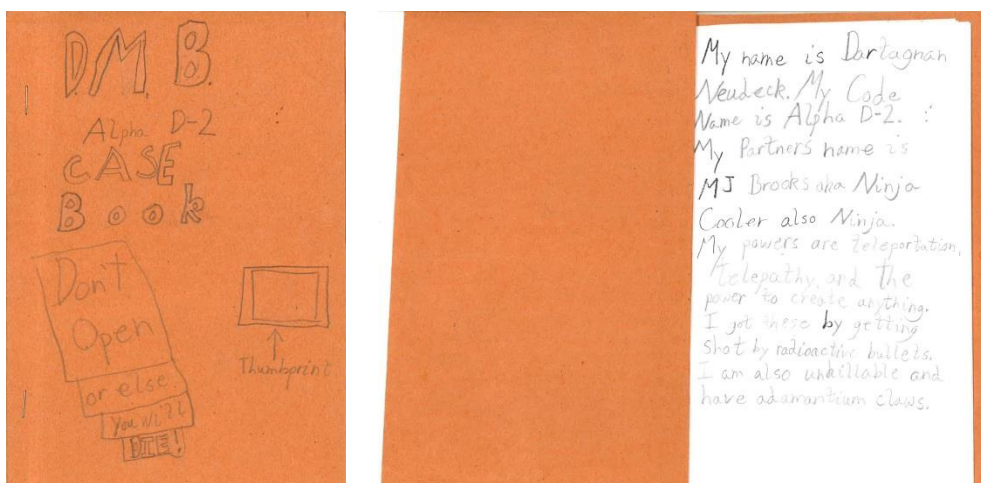
- *3:30-4:00: Kids receive instructions as one group (if one group finishes before the other, groups can also get this separately; be flexible)*
 - *Groups of 2 or 3 kids will each choose a mystery to solve. Each kid will be given 4 or 5 “clues” from which they will solve the case. Here’s the catch (which we don’t tell them): the “clues” are just random facts about loosely related topics. The idea is that they’ll make them into their own unique stories from these “clues” because humans make stories out of everything. If this doesn’t go as smoothly as I plan, we can give them more clues or some advice.*

In practice, this setup actually went together fairly seamlessly. I had Kya Simmons, a very capable volunteer (of course, all of my volunteers are very capable), coordinating the new recruits and they finished their activities just as we were wrapping up discussion after the story, so we were able to get all of them started hunting for clues at the same time.

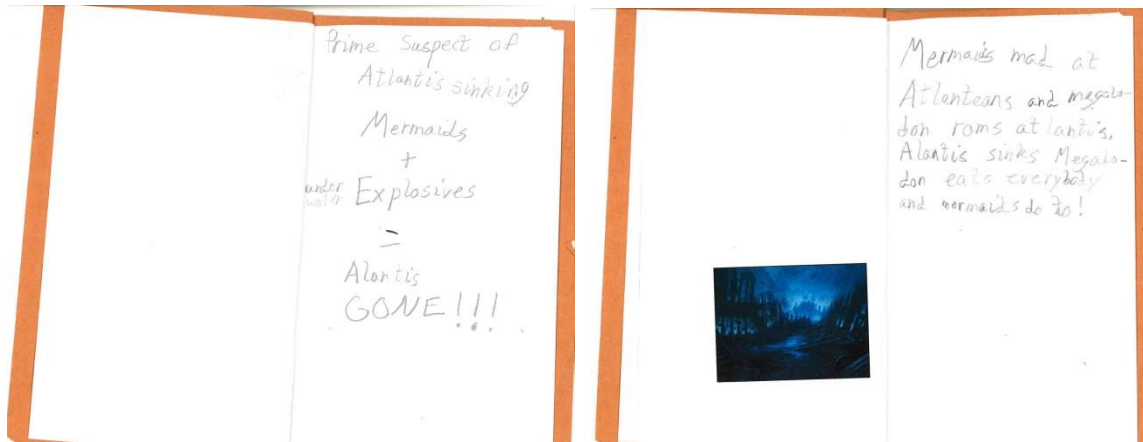




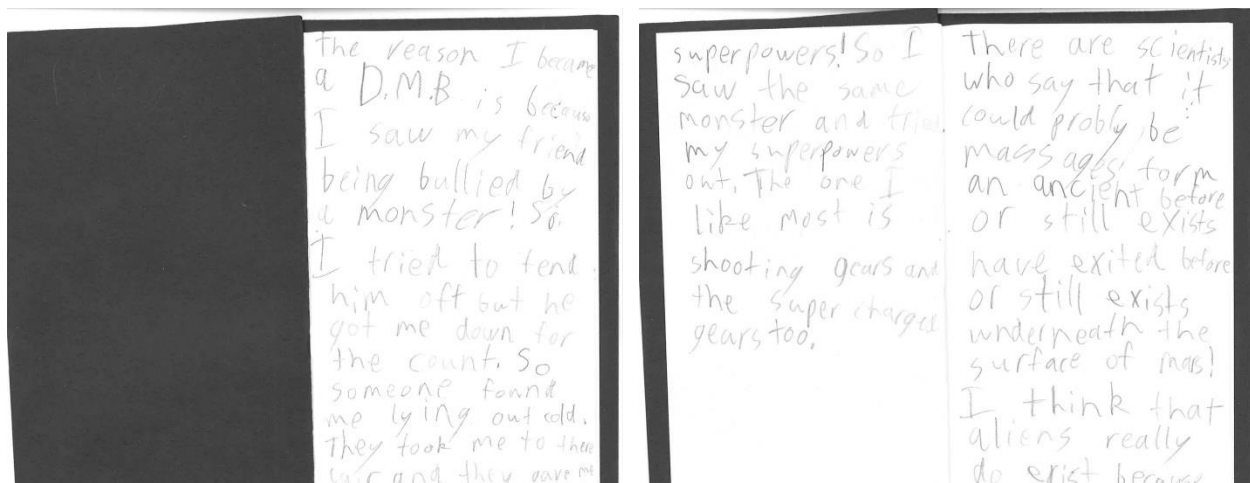
I was a little worried about this activity because I had spent so much time coming up with and formatting the “clues” that I hadn’t done a very good job framing the specific “cases.” I had put together three different sets of random facts/pseudo-facts: Atlantis, life on Mars, and mermaids. Some of them, I made up, some of them were conspiracy theories or legends, and some of them were objective facts from reliable sources. My ideal had been simply to have them make connections between their clues, but I belatedly realized that that method left a lot of room for confusion. It didn’t help that I gave them pretty vague “mysteries” to choose from, asking them to sort out what had happened either to Atlantis, to civilization on Mars, or to mermaids.



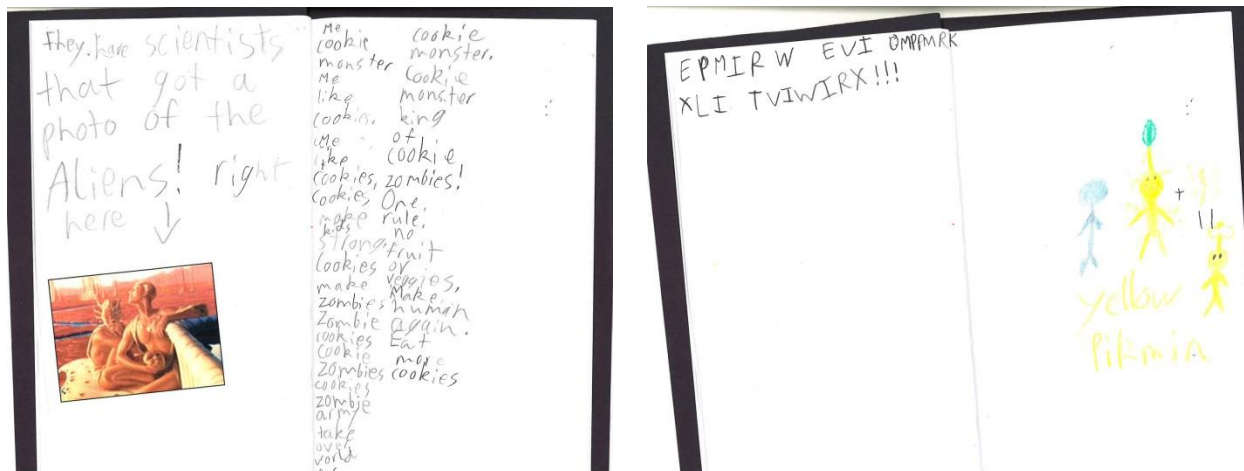
Dartagnan’s casebook.



In practice, though, the volunteers were probably more confused about what I wanted than the kids were. The kids didn't always do exactly as I'd hoped, but they all really loved the clues. As a last minute addition, I put pictures related to the themes on the back and they really enjoyed that a *lot* more than they enjoyed the actual clues. I'm not sure how many kids even realized that there was writing on the back. Some kids made captions for the photos, some kids wrote a story integrating all of them, and some kids worked together figuring out the connections between the pictures. This last group didn't produce as much writing, but they constructed a few sophisticated theories on the sinking of Atlantis, pulling in outside sources as well as the material I gave them.

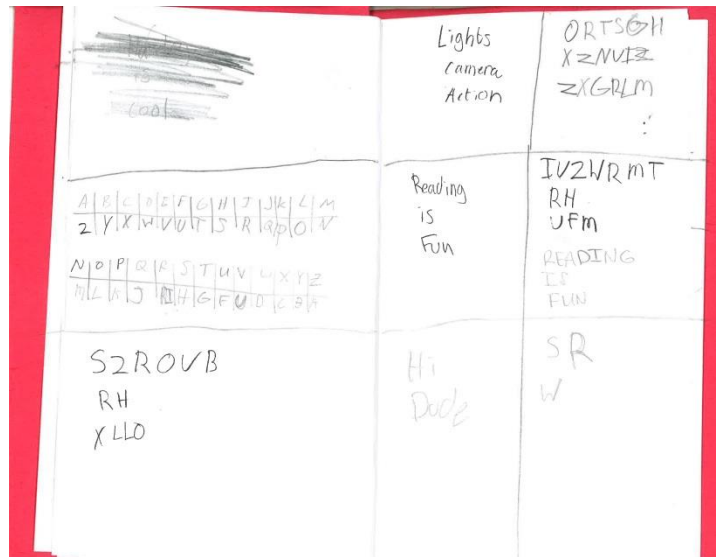
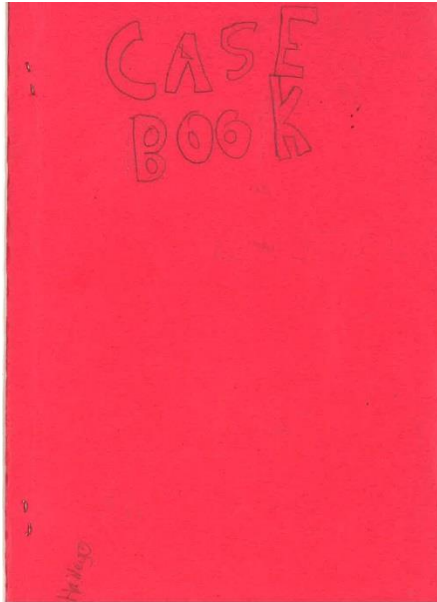


Riley's casebook. The second two pages are from later activities, breaking codes, making codes, and coded self-portrait.



This activity worked surprisingly well, and so I followed it up next week with a more explicitly narrative activity. For this activity, I made a newspaper template. I added pictures that went together thematically but didn't necessarily tell a story. I told them that the words had all been erased, and so they had to put them back and figure out what the stories originally were. The results were about the same, except that there was a bit less ambiguity about this project.

The first half of this semester has been more concerned with story-building and thinking about mysteries as stories; the week after clue-constructing marks our introduction to actual codes and ciphers. For that week, I brought in the NSA distinction between codes and ciphers and we had a discussion about different ways that code could be used. After that, we unscrambled a secret message and then the kids who finished that worked on some substitution ciphers I made.



Hailey's casebook. The picture above are the coded messages Hailey sent. The picture to the left is Hailey's self portrait.

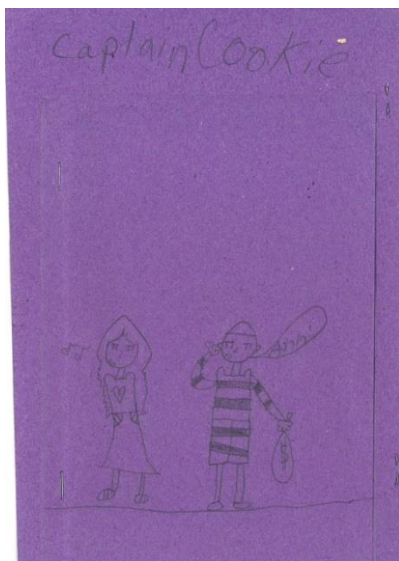
The weeks following this are constructed to expand how we think about codes and ciphers; ultimately, they will lead back to storytelling. Writing our own codes went pretty well because one of my volunteers, Connor, is a code enthusiast and helped me explain different kinds of codes to them (after I almost irretrievably confused them with my own confusion). We talked about why we might need to send a message in code, and then I had them write down the plaintext (the regular English version) and then we put them into code. I brought in a description

of how to do substitution and shift ciphers, and specific examples like Ancient Egyptian and Mayan hieroglyphics. I also left open the option to make our own code and I made some pony hieroglyphics with some of the third graders.

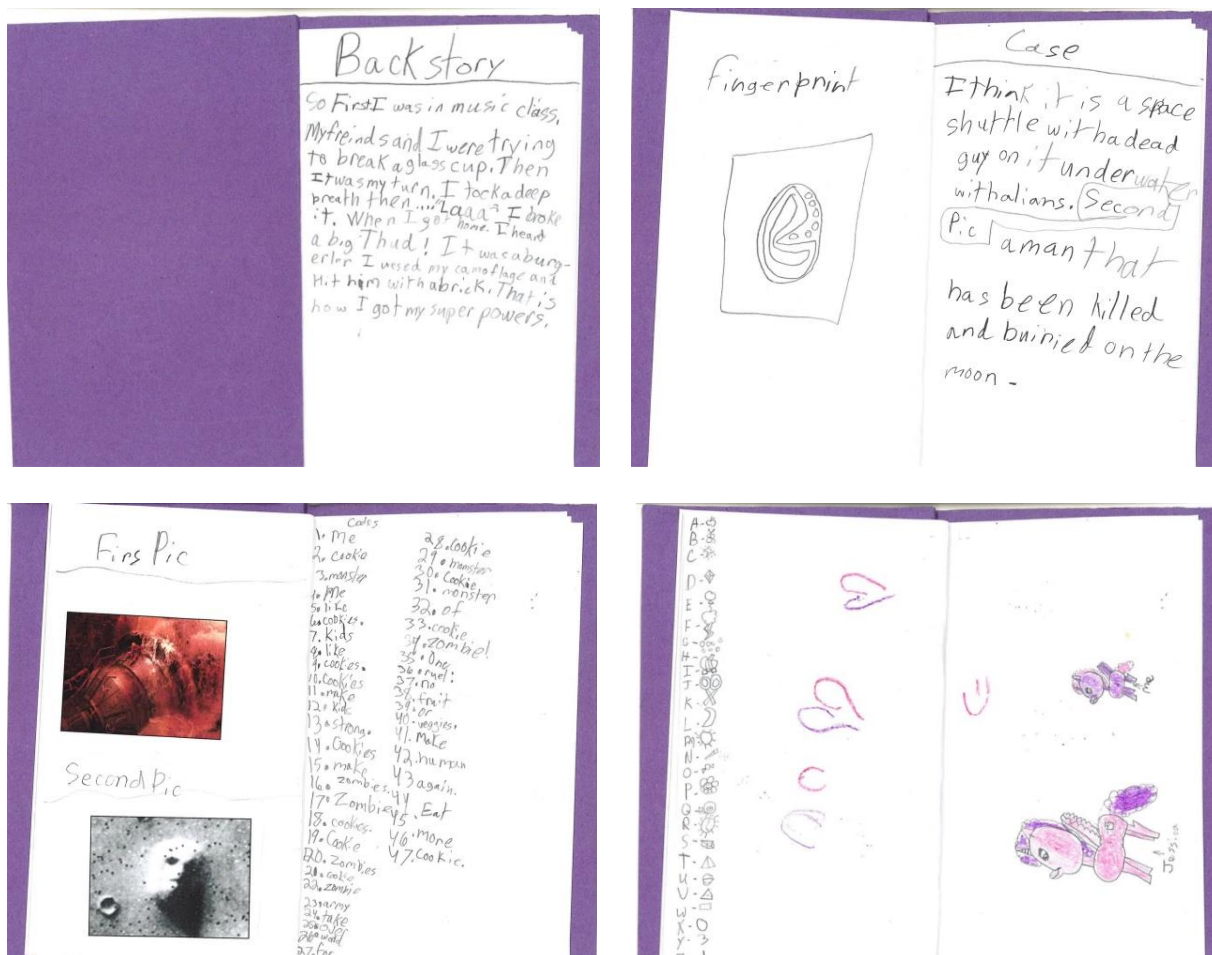
After working with these more conventional codes and ciphers, I want to try to get the kids thinking about how else to encode “secret” messages. During the sixth and seventh week, we look at symbolism in art: colors, symbols, flowers, style, etc. During the first week on art, we focused on color. We talked about the associations that different colors have, specifically with emotion. Then, I had them make color-coded self-portraits, where the colors they used said something about their character. We’ll talk about how they help make a painting a story, and for the first week we will “decode” pictures. The second week, we will make our own coded artwork. I might include an additional activity where we use the *Mysteries of Harold Burdick* to write more conventional stories, giving them the option of a few different prompts.



Anonymous. I remember being told that I was being featured as a zombie in someone's portrait, but can't remember whose...There's a decent chance it was Sadey.



Courtney's casebook. (Yes, I am the big pony in her self-portrait. She tells me that pink means cookies.)



After working with art, we transition to drama, looking at body language as codes. We can talk about how we understand gestures like shaking or nodding our head, and talk about other nonverbal clues we read all the time. Then we move on to the more lasting implications of body language for a detective's everyday life and for storytellers. Studying movement is an excellent way to go about character profiling, so we'll have an activity exploring the way that you move when feeling a certain way, or planning to do certain things. Arthur Lessac's body energies, radiancy, buoyancy, and potency, help us to think about character stereotypes. A villain about to do something bad might move slowly, with a lot of intention, with potency—a fairy about to play a prank might move with radiancy. Having the kids feel what it's like to move like the character will lead us into an activity where we make our own villains.



We're doing something special for our last meeting, on April 30th. I'm collecting donations from parents so that we can have a pizza party. First, I'm going to have them fill out exit surveys similar to the ones from last semester. After that, we'll have pizza, maybe a game, and we'll watch a movie. All of the volunteers who can come will be welcome to attend. I think that this will be a nice way to celebrate the end of our adventure.

Surveying Make-Believe: The Reflection

Changes: The Advantages of a Generative Method

I mentioned that my first day was a terrific success. At the time, it certainly didn't feel that way. Being in that room in charge of seventy children, watching my plan crumble before my eyes and wondering what that blue stuff was on the floor (someone had apparently found it necessary to bring glitter to school that day) was humiliating. In reflection, it became humbling—it confronted me with the reality of my situation. I was a soft-spoken twenty-year old college kid with a rosy-tinted plan of liberating the oppressed school children and creating some sort of academic utopia according to the theories of likeminded people. That disillusioning first day made me adjust my plan to make it more and more concrete and doable, even if my dream is still to create an alternative classroom culture.

The first day was a success because it forced me into a flexible mindset; it made me realize the necessity for constant adjustment. I thought at first that this also meant throwing out all of the frameworks I'd spent a summer building. Paulo Freire had *clearly* never worked with children if he expected anything at all to ever get by employing a purely dialogic method with a class full of 8-10 year olds. Explicitly generating all of the class material from their suggestions would be impossible at that stage, not just difficult. I tried a few times to leave things open-ended, but they need some sort of structure for there to be any sort of productivity. I needed to come in with something specific to talk about and a specific activity to do in order for them to not get confused, which is perfectly understandable: to do much else would be to confuse myself, and if I'm confused, so are they. So I really resented Freire for being so misleadingly optimistic for the first semester that I worked with this.

However, my last section traced the evolution of my lesson plans and activities. This evolution itself is Freirean because it conceives of the structure of the program as generative. Every week was an experiment. Every day was a reaction to the previous days, an attempt to solve the problems that came up and to capitalize on their strengths. I duplicated activities that worked because the kids liked them; I moved toward smaller, more flexible groups because it facilitated more of an informal environment. When they reacted positively to having more time for discussion, I made that a main part of our activities. Et cetera. The success of every day is completely dependent upon how responsive I am to the kids' wants and needs, and how capable I am of making my goals consistent with that generative framework.

This section identifies some of the most important themes that have consistently come up over the last year, that have been the underlying causes of a lot of the changes I've made. I'm describing the issues I came across and how I dealt with them; I did not always deal with them successfully, and I do not always have suggestions I'm confident about. Bringing these topics up is important for an accurate idea of what the program consists of, though, and it is helpful to have an idea about what to expect before attempting to do anything like what I did. If I had a chance to talk to a past version of myself before walking into that elementary school, these would be the things I would warn myself about.

Clarity

Clarity is extremely important at every level and in every capacity for the workshop to work. From day one, clarity determines what my volunteers expect to be doing (and thus what kind of volunteers I get), what kids expect from the call-out letter, and what parents are prepared to help me with (transportation and snacks). Clear communication is sometimes the only thing

that gets us to the school in one piece. Consciously prioritizing clear, direct, organized communication with parents, volunteers, and the kids has also helped me to make sure that my thoughts are clear and organizing. Generally, if I'm unable to articulate what I want, it's because I don't really know. It's important to realize this before the fact.

Administration

I don't have a whole lot of communication with the administration. I interacted a lot with the principal in the beginning stages of the program while I was still figuring out logistics and finding the space that worked best for me. She was helpful, but hasn't shown all that much interest in what we're doing. This has worked out fine for me, because I have freedom to run things however I want, but I feel that it might have been helpful if I'd had more communication with the school, particularly teachers. It would have been helpful to get suggestions for lesson plans and about the kinds of activities kids respond to from teachers.

The school has been good about passing out the information I give them to keep kids updated and about helping me find the right space for the workshops. The biggest problem I've had seems minor, but has been frustrating. The secretaries keep calling it "the enrichment program." I think that they started doing this at first because I didn't explain what my program was about clearly enough. "Enrichment program" has connotations of a tutoring program; a program for kids who have trouble reading or writing. I think that this connotation has influenced the kinds of kids that attend the program.

I'm afraid that I will be misread here as being elitist; that really isn't my intention. The thing is, during the first semester the kids really didn't seem interested in what I wanted to do. It was a challenge to get them focused and motivated until MONSTERS started. I tend to attribute

this to my failure to facilitate activities that the kids like; this was certainly a factor and almost certainly the larger factor. However, at one point during my first section, I had a fourth grade teacher walk in. She looked around for a few minutes and then took me aside and said, “You know that you have all of the ADD kids from fourth and fifth grade in here, right?” She was joking...but only slightly. I worked with this, and I think that it really forced me to be more flexible in the way that I approached the program. It forced me to get creative with how to engage them, and I think that it was a good learning experience. I’m still not sure how much of the difficulty was that the teacher was right and how much of it was that I was incompetent. Each section since then has gotten easier; I think this is both because I’ve been a lot more careful about being specific in my communication and because I’ve just gotten more used to being in charge of the class.

Parents

My interaction with parents mostly consists of advertising before the program and keeping them updated on logistical details during the semester. I learned early on how important it is for parents to understand exactly what it is I’m doing. On the first day of the program, a lot of parents treated it as a free babysitting opportunity; there were a lot of kids there who had no idea what Letters to Make-Believe was actually about. A lot of this was my fault because my advertising hadn’t been clear enough; I had still had a fuzzy idea of what I wanted to see happen at that point. The name didn’t even solidify until *after* it had already begun.

Clear, effective communication with the parents for the next section made things run a lot smoother. Parents can be an excellent resource. I realized that buying snacks every week myself was expensive; this was a real object of concern for me throughout the first section because they

had become an expectation after I brought them the first time. When I sent out the call-out letter for Letters to Make-Believe: MONSTERS, I leveled with parents about this and asked if they would be able to provide snacks for a week. Most parents were willing, and so I scheduled a parent for every week. However, because I sent out notices the week before instead of having a set schedule, I didn't get them out in time and had to bring them myself. This was entirely my failure, so I remedied it for Decoding Make-Believe by sending out a semester schedule.

The call-out letter is an important part of getting each section started, and so I have been careful to have a more comprehensive picture of my program than I did for the first one. I include a watered down version of my mission statement, a general description of the kinds of activities we'll be doing, and a clear description of meeting times. This information ideally (it usually works, but not always) helps to encourage students interested in the kinds of activities we were doing to join, instead of having students there who expect something else. It also just gives parents plenty of time in advance to plan. Having to communicate this put a lot of pressure on me to have a coherent mission statement, which in turn helped me to design activities.

Volunteers

Having been a volunteer myself in the past, I feel like it's really my responsibility to be as clear and thorough in my communication with volunteers as possible. They need to have access to my plan in as much detail as much in advance as possible so that they aren't left floundering. As a volunteer, when I don't have a clear idea of what's going on, I feel disoriented and not able to do anything without direction; I don't want that for my volunteers. I don't want this to just be another service project—I want it to be meaningful and I want them to feel

engaged with whatever they're doing. I take their feedback very seriously and make myself available for any concerns or comments.

My volunteer call-out letters are just as important as the call-out letters for the kids. I want to make sure to attract people who are actually interested in literature/creative writing or in working with kids, not just people who need community service hours. I also don't want to give them a flowery idea of what they'll be dealing with—they need an honest idea of what the kids are like and what I expect them to do. People tend to appreciate the level of detail I include in my ads, and my volunteers have been fantastic.

Sending them a weekly outline ahead of time does a few things for me. First of all, it makes it possible for the decision-making to be democratic. I try to send out plans far enough in advance that if people have suggestions for changes, I can put them into practice before we're headed out the door. While I usually don't get any responses to my outlines, it has the potential to help volunteers prepare mentally and emotionally and to think of any questions they might have, or additions they might make. I also try to meet early enough to go over the plan verbally in more detail before we get there.

Kids

This is probably the most important, and often the most difficult, part of communication. If I don't say things in a way that the kids understand, things become twice as hard as they need to be. This process begins in the first five minutes of the first day. I introduce myself and tell them what the program's about. Not all of it will stick. I have to simplify it; this should be common sense, but it is sadly something that I have had to learn. I failed utterly to define the program in my first section; MONSTERS was better; Decoding Make-Believe is the most

successful example of leaving kids with an accurate idea that they are here to read, write, and learn about language and literature. Getting some trace of the abstract motivation behind the entire structure to stick is important because it gives the kids a background for what they're working toward. It affects the way they approach our activities.

Having this abstract understanding is important, but it is just as important for them to have a basic understanding of every day's layout. I start out with attendance and an attempt to tell them what we'll be doing. This sounds a lot easier than it actually is. They have been sitting in a desk for eight hours. Now they're free and they're with their friends. Getting their attention, especially at the beginning, is a challenge. And so I have had to learn the most effective way to convey information to them: take advantage of the thirty seconds you have their undivided attention. Then, let them have a restroom break and move around. Then jump right in before they have a chance to get distracted again.

This framework tends to work pretty well, but I'm still working on how best to command their attention without being mean. In this respect, every day is a challenge. My most important goal is to create an environment where they experience informal learning; where they are hanging out with people they look up to who listen to them; where they are encouraged to express themselves and not be afraid of getting shut down. However, I also need to avoid anarchy. If I'm being perfectly honest, we spend a lot of time skirting the abyss of chaos. But I can't assert a strict, top-down hierarchy without crushing their trust. And so I keep skirting that line, finding ways of guiding it back toward order to varying degrees of success (I'll be coming back to this), as long as we don't make the plunge into disorder. That's happened a few times and when it does, I have had to be more assertive.

Communication is also an important factor in whether or not each activity succeeds. I design all of my own lesson plans. This means that I don't always know exactly what I'm doing. If I'm trying to do something a little outside of my comfort zone, I'm not as good at facilitating it as I am at literary discussion or having them make a craft. I quit trying to do as many theater exercises because I didn't have the time to get comfortable enough with them to facilitate them effectively. During Decoding Make-Believe, I've made sure to stay very conscious of my strengths and weaknesses. When I've not known enough about a topic, I've spent time looking at and using good sources.

Or, this has been the idea at least. I used NSA's code-cracking kid website to help introduce secret codes to the kids. I used similar sources for the follow-up lesson, where we were supposed to make up our own codes. However, I myself was still a little confused about making my own codes. I could do it, but I wasn't quite comfortable teaching others how to do it. This became painfully apparent as I was trying to explain the activity to them; they were confused about what kinds of codes to send, and which codes to use. I was trying to explain substitution codes and failing, when I flagged one of my volunteers (a code enthusiast) to just step in. She did, and explained everything much better than I could have hoped to. I owe the success of that day to Connor because of her ability to communicate with them so well and hold their attention.

Lesson Plans

I decided that creating my own lesson plans was necessary a long time before I completely understood what exactly that would entail. At that stage, I had no idea where I would find lesson plans doing what I wanted to do. I didn't go about finding them because throughout

this process I have never been able to shake off the influence of Freire entirely. I remembered how stupid I thought all of the prompts had been when I was in elementary school. In retrospect, I didn't have much reason to think that the only solution to boring school drills was to create my own material. Often, though, my specific goals did require that I make my own plans. Finally, in order for the content to be dynamic and generative, it needed to respond directly to the students' interests and reactions to prior lessons. I have been relatively successful in making the lesson plans do this; I'm not as confident that they have been carried out in such a way that fully takes advantage of it. I've certainly gotten better at it, but there is always room for improvement.

While I think that overall, it has been beneficial to spend so much time personalizing these lesson plans, it takes an enormous amount of energy to do this well. My efforts don't always create consistent results. Sometimes, the lesson plans fall flat. I'll start with an overall take-away point I want them to have; for example, when I constructed the newspaper activity, I wanted them to take away two points: (1) the narrative power of pictures and (2) the fact that different narratives that can come from the same source. You can start with the same "clues" and make them what you will. Many things are left to our interpretation, so it pays to be a good storyteller.

Having a clear intent is important, but often the part that's more difficult for me is making it concrete. Turning an idea into an activity and making them actually make sense to third through fifth graders is difficult for me. I struggle with this for many, many hours every week. I don't usually succeed in completely translating my intentions into comprehensible lesson plans. For example, my newspaper activity resulted in most kids just writing captions for the pictures. It didn't work out exactly as I'd planned, but I don't consider it a failure. They took what I gave them and made it their own thing; it still involved their interpreting the pictures,

and their conversations reflected the narrative-making goal I'd set out with. A lot of the success of the lesson plans depends not on their perfection, but their flexibility. If they can be adapted to whatever the kids latch onto during discussion, usually they work pretty well.

I started out with a narrative arc for activities; I'd planned out eight weeks of writing prompts that built on each other. When the kids consistently didn't like doing the prompts, I had to readjust everything. So, for the first semester, the activities were mostly "generative"—they came from how the kids responded to previous ones. Every week was a scramble to get everything together. So, partially to scramble less and partially to figure out what the kids actually thought of the program, I had them fill out exit surveys on the last day of Letters to Make-Believe: MONSTERS. These are included in the Appendices and in them I had them vote on the theme of the next section. Because I had a theme and because kids had given me feedback on the kinds of activities they liked, I was able to tie it all together and make a narrative arch for Decoding Make-Believe. That's made moving from week to week smoother, though it still feels like a mad dash every week.

Structure

As I said in my implementation section, I spent a lot of time tinkering with structure in my first semester to find a setup that works. Things that seemed minor at first quickly became important, like the order of activities and snacks. People always laugh when I tell them this, but having snacks might be one of the most important things to ensure a workshop's success. Most of the kids are used to an afterschool snack about this time, and so they can be hungry and a little grumpy before they get a snack. They also really like to bring the snacks and pass them out—it

makes them feel like they're contributing, like they have something to be in charge of. It's also a nice ultimatum to have.

The order of events is really important to get them in a productive, creative mindset. I have settled on a pretty basic layout: attendance, bathroom break, snack and story/lesson, discussion, (warm-up activity), activity. At the beginning of the program, I tried to cram way too much into one hour. I tried having two warm-up activities, tried rotating groups to do different activities, tried having two main activities instead of one. All of these attempts were just frustrating for us and for the kids—the kids didn't have time to get acclimated to what we were doing and having to worry about time and rotating them distracted me from interacting with the kids themselves. It's a lot better to focus on a few things and making those activities count.

I knew early on that I wanted as much one-on-one time between kids and volunteers as possible, so I tried to get them into smaller groups whenever I could. For the first semester, I divided them into groups myself and each group had a leader. It kept things more orderly, but the kids complained about the groups they were in, it took a long time to get them in the right place, and the group dynamics didn't always work. This semester, I've allowed them to gravitate toward their own groups and just had volunteers circulating to make sure nothing's on fire. This makes the environment feel a lot freer. The kids have been happier, things have been more streamlined, and they're more productive. Yeah, they goof off, but no more than they did before.

We've been focusing more on discussion for *Decoding Make-Believe*. After I read the story, or introduce the material that I have planned for that day, I ask the kids some related questions. You'd think that with my declared philosophical alliances, the kids' unfailingly enthusiastic participation in discussion wouldn't come as a surprise, but it has. During *Letters*

and even Monsters, I was still hung up on making sure we had time for everything, and so I downplayed discussion. Now, when I ask a discussion question, every hand shoots up. If I pass over someone so that we can move on to the next thing, they make sure to let me know that they have something to say. Since encouraging this more, a lot of kids have come out of their shells and there has been more overall engagement with activities. I have to cut it short before it reverts to anarchy (sometimes difficult to judge), but it really does increase overall engagement with the lesson and with the activity.

Volunteers

I keep referring to what I'm doing as "my program." I cringe a little every time I do that because I would really like for it to be more "our program." Of course, I designed it; I put it into practice; I plan every week. But I would like to see it evolve into something where a single person isn't the spearhead, where it's more of a collaboration.

During the first semester of Letters to Make-Believe, I advertised in the English, Theater, and HoScho departments. My idea was that people in these departments were likely to be interested in what I'm doing, particularly creative writing. The response was enthusiastic, but I forgot to account for the fact that these people also tend to be pretty busy with their own projects. Also, my program is at a very awkward time; the kids get out of school at 3, so I need my volunteers from like 2:40-4:15, right in the middle of their day. I have had a lot more success with access to the list of students involved in DePauw Community Service and Bonner Scholar. These students already plan to regularly devote a part of their time to service and there are a lot of them, so their interests vary. I would like to find a way to bring my program under DCS, but didn't have a concrete enough structure to feel comfortable doing that in its first year.

The volunteers that I've gotten have been fantastic. Connor Tomasko and Quin Abarr have been helping me all year; this semester, I have been lucky enough to add Kya Simmons, Madeline LeClaire, Angela Cotheman, and Ran Bi to my list. They are wonderful, enthusiastic, and patient. They are where they're needed, usually without my telling them what to do. While I'm organizing everything, they do a good job of helping the kids on an individual level and making everything work. They are enthusiastic and make the kids feel respected and appreciated, and they are a vital part of what the program is. When I'm confusing, some of them (Connor and Kya in particular) are really good at translating what I want into sane person words.

However, if I'd organized volunteers the way I want, I could have facilitated an alternative culture of volunteers to reflect the alternative classroom culture I want. Now, a part of this is because this program is my vision and I have been refining it all year. Things change every week; I'm experimenting with what works in terms of general frameworks and specific lesson plans. To make my volunteer base what I think it should be, I would have needed the capability to give them the blueprints I'm still working on so that they would have a framework within which to participate more fully.

I would like to see less hierarchy. Right now, I ask them to do things and they do them. I try to leave open the chance for volunteers to express their opinions, but I'm afraid that I don't give them enough of a chance. I send out e-mails, but I don't always do it with a whole lot of time to respond with changes. I ask for suggestions, but I'm afraid that often I'm so frazzled that I might not be as approachable as I would like to think I am. Furthermore, since this is an emergent project, a lot of it is experimental and so it takes a lot of work to make the changes. I've felt too bad to ask them to do much beyond going with me.

Originally, I had hoped to pull in volunteers from the Greencastle community as well as the DePauw community. I didn't do this mostly because of the amount of time and energy that would have taken. Networking is a weakness of mine; I minimized it so that I could focus on establishing the fundamentals of the program before branching out, but I think that it would be great if the program could be expanded to include Greencastle artists, high school kids, and DePauw students. The artists would be mentors for the DePauw students and the high schoolers; the DePauw kids would mentor high school kids; high school would mentor middle school; and so on and so forth. To expand it to that extent would probably take several years, but that would be ideal because it would bridge gaps between university and community, age groups, and different school systems. Each would bring a different perspective and a different set of skills.

Discipline

Discipline is a real weak spot for me. I don't like thinking about it, I don't like talking about it, I don't like doing it, I don't like failing to do it. It's not fun. Yet I have to think about it, I have to talk about it, I have to do it. I often fail to do it well, which means that everyone has to deal with disruptive kids and it takes longer to get anything done. It feels unprofessional to spend this much time introducing how much I hate this, but I think it's an important part of the program's functioning.

I really don't have a whole lot of experience being in charge of kids. I want to be their friend; it's important to me that I'm someone they feel comfortable with, who cares about what they have to say. I struggle with balancing this with a healthy amount of respect. I've gotten better, but I still am probably more flexible than I should be when it comes to disorder in the classroom in general. Now, things are mostly chaotic toward the end of discussion when things

begin to unravel. They've been really good about focusing on their activities once we finally manage to get them doing them though.

The biggest problem has been dealing with one or two kids that make up 85% of the disruption. In the first section, there were two. I'll call them Jeff and Codey. Jeff had a hearing aid, and in school he was in a special education class. Codey, I think, had ADD; he was mostly a problem when he was with Jeff. Jeff would shout over all of the other kids, he and Codey play fought all the time, and he would move the desks around in a way that made me concerned he would hit the other kids. He made it really hard to get anything organized; someone had to be with him, talking just to him, constantly for him to participate in any of the activities. When I realized that he responded well to that, individual attention did work. However, at that time I only had three volunteers—I was usually the one to spend all that time with him. I didn't even know half of the other kids' names by the end of it because so much of my time was devoted to helping him.

In the second section, Jeff didn't come back, but Codey did. On his own, Codey became a lot more disruptive than he had in the previous section, or maybe I spent so much time dealing with Jeff that I didn't notice. He would throw things, run around the library, and he sulked a lot because he didn't like the things we were doing. There were several times where a particular kid told me that he had had a conflict with Codey; Codey always blamed him. He got a little better when I tried giving him more attention like I had with Jeff, but he very rarely showed any interest in what we were doing. I definitely got the impression that he didn't want to be there, that his parents were making him be there.

Codey didn't return for Decoding Make-Believe but Bain (pseudonym) has risen to take his place. In terms of pure disruptive power, Bain just might take the cake. I have not seen him sit still for longer than two consecutive minutes in the seven weeks that I've known him. His mother told me in advance that he has ADD, and so I knew to expect having to spend a little more time working with him. That usually hasn't been quite enough though. He runs around, jumps into the reading circle, crawls under the tables, does somersaults, throws things, shouts, antagonizes the other kids, and refuses to do any of our activities. Giving him more individual attention mediates this somewhat, but it has not overall gotten him to participate or significantly lessened the disruption.

Two weeks ago, another kid came up to me and told me that Bain had punched him in the stomach. I sent a note home about it the following week, but I made the mistake of giving it to him to put in his backpack at the beginning of the workshop instead of the end. He was worse than usual. A kid had a phone out and he was paranoid about him taping him; he kept shouting at him to put it down. He targeted the kid whom he had hit. He kept raising his voice with me, asking if I was going to call his mom. I told him I would next week if his behavior remained the same. I stayed with him most of the time, and at the very end got him to sit down. He sprawled all over the table and a third grade girl asked him to move. He hid behind the desk. Then he raised his voice with her, demanding to know why she didn't like him. I tried to mediate and the girl started crying. By this time it was time to leave.

For all of these students, it may have been better and certainly would have been easier to have their parents not bring them back. If Bain continues to act this way next week, I will be doing just this. They really detract from the experience of all of the other kids and they wear me and the other volunteers out so that we have less energy to make it fun. I have persisted in trying

to work with them for a few reasons. First, I have really wondered about the home life for a few of them, particularly Bain. This might be one of the few chances they get to have a supportive environment. Second, I want to make it accessible to as many kids as I can; kids who need help channeling their energy, creativity, or thoughts need programs like mine more than others. Third, I just want to see them succeed. I want to be able to help them think about learning as fun, and to see and enjoy using their own abilities. I really can't say that I feel I've succeeded with the last goal, but I've done everything I can think of doing and I think I've improved.

If I were to do this all again, I'd do a lot of things differently. I would make more of an effort to interact with teachers and parents. I would be more assertive and still allow some chaos, but not as much. I would have one or two volunteers there with the understanding that they are responsible for watching one specific kid on a given day. I would be less afraid of being more assertive about punishments. I would be more decisive about an acceptable code of behavior so it is clearer when someone has gone too far.

Concluding Make-Believe (for now)

This entire document is a secondary product. The primary audience of this document, thus the secondary audience of the overall project, would ideally be people interested in making the same kinds of changes I want to see. Hopefully they will be continuing Letters to Make-Believe (or a variant) in Putnam County, with the kids that stuck it through with me. If not, they might be putting it in practice in their own communities. Or maybe they are already educators; they already have their own classrooms and lesson plans. Their experience outweighs mine by years, maybe decades; their command of the classroom probably puts mine to shame. I think I might still have some insights for this audience precisely because I am such a beginner and my background is in Literature, not education. My goals are unconstrained by the limitations they've built their plans on, and so some of the things I've tried (particularly the activities I came up with myself) might translate as a break from routine.

However, as this is an Honor Scholar thesis, I would be lying if I didn't say that the immediate audience of this document is not my committee. I would really like to pass, and so this is my main concern at the moment. This committee consists of very educated individuals committed to the same goals in the classroom as I am, just on a different level. I'm used to being the student in their context; I'm used to the rules of communication here. This format feels more natural to me than working with the kids did at first; now it feels odd for this particular context. I have kept this in mind while constructing this document; I have been highly conscious of every time I used the passive tense or a loose demonstrative (there's one on the other side of this semicolon) or when my voice became too personal. My project, however, has evolved into something I have a really hard time calling academic. I can't avoid using a personal voice

because this is a personal project—to make it too “academic” would not only make it boring; it would be a lie.

Even though they determine the fate of my labor for the year, my committee is still a secondary audience. The audience that really matters (no offence to the reader—if you’re reading this, it’s because you are someone whom I respect and whose perspective I value very highly) is the audience for the primary product. The audience to whom I’m really selling this often misspells the word “broccoli” (which is perfectly understandable—that one took me a while too). Their schedules are in the hands of adults concerned with their well-being more than their input. Their collective attention span is a fragile thing which would be no match for more than a page or two (the title page and the blank page after that) of this document.

It feels paradoxical to hand this in as the capstone of this year when my primary audience isn’t even really aware of the fact that I’m writing this. I’ve mentioned it, but they don’t care; most of the time, neither do I. My entire year, from the beginning of last summer until this moment, has largely rotated around my Honor Scholar thesis, but not this part of it, not the secondary product. This document began as my main concern, but my attention shifted to simply making the program work, and then making it work better and better, the instant that I stepped foot in that gymnasium and realized how hard it was going to be.

I’m not saying this to delegitimize the last seventy-some pages I’ve made you read. This is still important as a reflection; it has forced me to document my motivations and examine whether or not I was successful. However, I don’t feel that this document quite captures the reality of the project. In an attempt to capture that spirit, I want to talk a little more about my primary audience to explain why this is important.

The Kids.

This project began when I decided to fill a gap in the community that I'd felt growing up. I tried to make something that would have benefited me, and other kids who need a creative outlet. This made me a little narrow-minded at first because it played a role in the kinds of things I did; they were reflections of what I wanted. As time went on and I got to know the kids better, though, my perspective shifted. It became about what these kids needed and wanted. It only seems appropriate to end by giving them some of the credit they deserve.

Don't expect for me to prove how my program's changed their lives. Don't expect a full account of all the stuff that they've done. Don't expect a whole lot of objectivity. Here, I'm talking about some kids that have stood out to me and how they have changed Letters to Make-Believe. The kids all gave me permission to use their images and to talk about them, but I'm changing their names to protect their privacy. I used their real names in the body, but my discussion here is a little more personal, is more directly about them, so I didn't feel right using their real names.

Jean

Okay, so I might contradict myself a bit here. I'm using a pseudonym for this kid, but it's a pseudonym she's had since she was born—Mean Jean. Variations have included at various times Mean Jean, the Jean, Jeaner (toddler years), Queen Jean (the *really* fun toddler years), and (finally) Ava. It's taken me a long time to come to terms with the fact that her name isn't actually Jean, and I've only recently called her by her real name about as much as her nickname. Jean, as you have gathered and as I think I mentioned before, is my sister. She was born when I

was eleven and I had two younger siblings; for the first three months after her arrival, I sincerely believed that she was a joke. I didn't really believe in her until I saw an ultrasound.

She was worshipped from the moment she entered this world. She was the unquestioned favorite; she might still be the unquestioned favorite, although that becomes less prominent as we all get older and treat her as a person instead of a little kid. Because there was such a big age difference, my other sister and I spent a lot of time babysitting Jean. I think having so many older siblings contributed to her being pretty advanced; she was talking and reading early. As she got older, I started to play more and more games I thought would encourage her to retain her imagination (and it was fun to mess with her). I told her stories about how dandelion seeds were actually villages for tiny fairies that were scattered to the winds when we blew on them and other things like that. When she got to be around four or five, I started to have her dictate stories to me. I would come up with something silly, and then let her develop it. We kept doing this (not as often as we should have) for years, and her stories got more involved.

She's taken off creatively; she writes stories on her own for fun and she reads voraciously. I think my part in this was minor, but my parents, my sister, and my brother all did things like this with her. This gave her a chance to think of creativity, to think of learning, as play. Now she has a love for reading as great as mine was when I was her age, she loves Greek mythology, and she plans to be an author and illustrator when she grows up. I'm told that I'm not allowed to do this myself because that's *her* job. I am really not a fan of attributing people's characteristics to biographical incidents like their upbringing, but I wonder if the fact that she was so loved and listened to didn't have a pretty big part in the passions she's discovered in herself. She isn't an artist because of her environment, but she grew up in an environment where

she was encouraged to take herself seriously as an artist and to approach art (and learning) playfully. Or she has if I'm not exaggerating this nostalgically, which is definitely a possibility.

I've let myself spend so much time talking about Jean because when the program started, I had to find a way to not show favoritism for her without hurting her feelings. Jean has made this really, really easy. She doesn't expect favoritism; she's quiet and she does her stuff and she hangs out with her friends. I think that sometimes she's a little disappointed with the program; she's told me that some of the kids are annoying and sometimes things are a little chaotic. I think she would like a more advanced program better, and I'd envisioned a more advanced program before realizing that that might not be practical with the range of ages and reading/writing levels I had in the program. Jean's kind of my eyes and ears in the program; I talk to her about things she likes and doesn't like, and sometimes I get some gossip about the other kids too. I take this with several grains of salt, but Jean's pretty sensitive to other people and tends to be fair, and so having her input has helped me understand (and hopefully not misunderstand) the kids a bit better.

Hazy

"I bet you can't get my name right." "Hallinderben?" "No, the other one." "Hazy?" "You got it! No one ever gets it!" I wish I hadn't decided not to use names, because that sequence works a lot better with her actual name. Her name sounds like the title of a children book, and she looks like the picture on the cover. Hazy has brown hair that's always falling into her eyes and just brushes her shoulders. She has enormous hazel eyes that are always emphatic, no matter what she happens to be talking about at the time. She wears glasses and has a voice that somehow matches the expressiveness of her face. She's like a cartoon character, with the

way she shakes her head and the idiosyncratic inflections of her voice. Her eyebrows shoot up so high they're usually swallowed by her hair.

I really like Hazy; she's got a lot of spunk. I met her on the first day of MONSTERS. Before I'd said a word to the group or introduced myself, she looked me right in the eye and told me I'd get her name wrong. When I got it right, I felt like I'd passed some sort of test; maybe because no one ever gets my name right, so the people who do pass some sort of inexpressible test that makes it just a little bit easier to trust them. She's very direct in a way that's both childish and adult—yes, it's partially her age, but there's something serious about her too.

She was in my group for monster charades, where I had everyone write down five monsters that they knew, mixed those up, and then took turns drawing from that pile and acting the monsters out. Hazy was the last to finish; she kept getting more slips of paper to write down more monsters. Everyone knew when we ran into one of Hazy's monsters because she wasn't content to use already-existing monsters: she made up her own. When we read them out loud (for example, the cotton candy monster), she rocked on her heels and bit her lip. She stood out to me at first mostly because she was so very expressive, so quirky, and having so much fun. I loved seeing that; it made me feel like I was doing something right. I kept noticing her because of her honesty—she hasn't loved everything we've done this much, but she always gives it all of her wide-eyed focus.

She also has a tendency to say things that pull me up short. She told me that she'd forgotten her case book because her dad was in surgery. The way she said this was sad, but wasn't as earth-shattering as when we were discussing the robber in one of *Encyclopedia Brown's* cases and she raised her hand. She said that her mom was a robber; that's why she's in

a foster home. (I can't remember if it's a foster or adopted home, but I think she said foster.) Someone said, "That's cool," and she said, more softly but insistently, "No it's not, it's sad..." I just stared at her for a minute, unsure of how to continue. I just wanted to make it better, but I had to continue class. Since then, I've been extra careful about listening to her, listening to everyone, when they come up to me with something, anything, to say. I don't know what I can do but listen and care and do what I can to make them feel empowered. I don't know that I always succeed at this, but I want someone to. There are teachers who must run into this every day at work.

Kenny

Kenny is in fifth grade. There were so few fifth graders in the beginning that he and I decided they could be in 4.5th grade because they were grouped with the fourth graders when I tried dividing them by grade. He made sure to remind me of this distinction on several occasions. He has reddish brown hair, has a buzz cut with a little bit of bangs that a lot of boys (particularly athletes) have around here, and he's a pretty big kid. He looks like a football player, not a writer. He is a football player, actually; he went to practice after he left the program.

Kenny is very loud and he can be gruff. He tends to drown out the other voices when he's in a group, but he has real leadership capabilities and interacts with others, especially younger kids, well. When we made our own monsters, there were a lot of "Kenny-monsters" because he frequently made a show of himself. He likes attention. He also has a good heart. The scuffles Cody had were with him; the two boys gave me different accounts and I'm inclined to believe Kenny. He's a big kid, and he seemed aware that he had a fine line to toe because the

other kid was so much smaller. He had trouble spelling, but he almost always did a good job of participating in the activities I gave them. Every time I came over to the table he was at, there would be lively discussion about whatever we were doing. Often, that discussion came around to the topic of toilet monsters, but they were monsters.

At first, I was a little surprised that Kenny was in the program. He didn't seem like the kind of kid who would be interested in this kind of thing. When I figured out the misunderstanding with my program as an "enrichment program," I thought that maybe that's why he was there. That was unfair of me—he stuck around for the entire first semester, and I really think that he would have been there for Decoding Make-Believe if his schedule allowed (I think he has baseball or something). When we started the MONSTER section, he surprised me with how knowledgeable he was about mythology. He really likes the "chupacabra" and the "narnicorn," and he was comfortable explaining monsters from Classical mythology to the younger kids with a clarity that impressed me. I shouldn't have been surprised—Kenny showed me the importance of one of my ostensible goals, to take them seriously and expect for them to be able to rise to the occasion.

Shawn

I wanted to be Shawn's friend; I was cripplingly shy when I was little, so I identify with the quiet kids. He has a freckly face, red hair, and he blushes easily. He is in fourth grade. He's really shy; it's hard to get him to come out of his shell and he doesn't always like to participate in our activities. He really didn't like doing crafts, but he liked doing charades. He seemed unenthusiastic about breaks, where he told me that he just cleaned and stayed around the house. I talked to Shawn mostly after the program because his parents were often twenty to thirty

minutes late picking him up. He was embarrassed about this; my mom was always late too, so I could relate. His eyes were blue and there was something sad about them.

A lot of what I know about Shawn, I heard from Ava. She told me that kids pick on him at recess because he's overweight. She told me that his family's really poor; they sometimes live in a church, and they can't afford to get him new clothes. I don't know how valid the gossip Ava heard is. After this, I redoubled my efforts to get him out of his shell when I could. I tried to make him feel that he was being listened to; I don't know if I succeeded, or if I just annoyed him, or if it would have mattered. He didn't come back after the first section. I wonder if it wasn't partially because his parents couldn't help with snacks, or because they were always late. I wish he'd have kept coming. I hope Ava's gossip was wrong; if it wasn't, I hope he finds some really good friends and comes into his own.

Riley

Stewart has this pseudonym partially because he reminds me of a mouse, or maybe a chipmunk, because his cheeks are a little chubby and he's really soft spoken. I heard about Riley before I met him; Codey told me that he was his friend and I told him that they could be in the same group if he promised they'd behave. Stewart did, Codey didn't. I remember that Quin was hesitant to put them in the same group because Stewart seemed to be actually interested in what we were doing and he was afraid that Codey would keep him from being able to participate. It turned out to be okay for Stewart, although I still wish I could have found a way to engage Codey.

Stewart, as I said, is very soft spoken. He was really shy at the beginning, but he was always sweet. For the first few weeks, he was really concerned about his mom coming to pick

him up late; she came to the door a little early if anything. He came up to me one week and asked if he could bring snacks. I let him, and he was really conscientious about passing them out. It really seemed to make him happy to be able to do that for people; since making it a regular thing to have kids bring snacks, I've noticed that most of them act somewhat like this. Stewart in particular likes being able to be helpful though.

He's opened up quite a bit lately. He's still quiet, but I think that the discussion time has made him more comfortable sharing his thoughts. He raises his hand almost every time, though he still pulls me aside to share his thoughts more privately. These are a mix of personal things, thoughts about the material, and requests to bring snacks next week. Last week he told me that his grandmother had died. I said I was so sorry that had happened, but didn't know what else to say. We were talking about how color can be used to express emotion, and so I tried to guide him gently to use it to express himself. His drawing was blue; he told me it had to do with a video game, but I have a feeling that there was something more to it.

Andy and Ann

I'm naming this pair Ann and Andy because they're brother and sister. Andy's in fifth grade. He's been with me since MONSTERS. He is really smart and really creative. When he's thinking, he likes to make a show of rubbing his chin like he's a bad guy. His hand is always one of the first ones to shoot up during discussion. When we made the monster books, he made sure that I'd read his and he told me that he was going to write another one over Christmas break that he wanted me to read. He let me keep his evil Christmas elf; right now, it's hanging on my fridge.

Ann is in third grade. She is always bright and cheerful; her eyes sparkle and she bounces a lot. She's been trying to sing us this rhyme about a witch, but she can never get past the second line without collapsing in giggles, so we always miss about half of it. Ann just started to come for Decoding Make-Believe and her hand is never far behind her brother's. We all spend a lot of time listening to Ann. I think she usually intends to make a relevant point, but sometimes it takes quite a while to connect with what we've been talking about. When I asked them about what they thought made a good detective, she said, "Well. . ." and we ended up getting a fifteen minute synopsis of an episode of what I think was My Little Pony. Her brother sometimes steps in to translate. When I try to cut her short, though, she is quick to assert her right to talk—she quite insists upon being heard. It's nice to see a kid fully aware of their right to be heard. Last week, I had the honor of appearing next to her in her self-portrait as a pink pony. When I asked what pink meant, she informed me that it meant cookies.

Mary Jane and Peter

I almost feel guilty about how much I like these two kids. I feel like the simple fact that I constantly feel that I have to hold the operation together (true to varying degrees, depending on the day) keeps favoritism from being a problem. Sometimes I have to consciously remind myself to not show favoritism to all of the kids that I've mentioned. But the kids that are positively bursting with curiosity and imagination and intelligence and creativity, and who really enjoy what we're doing are what really makes me feel like what I'm doing is worth it.

Mary Jane has been with us since MONSTERS! On the first day that we moved into the library, this little blonde girl came up to me and gave me a hug. Startled, I hugged her back. Then she hugged me again before she left. I was just as startled this time; I didn't even know her

name. I asked around and made sure I had it down before next time. After that, she kept catching my attention in other ways.

She usually looks very serious when she talks; her eyebrows knot together behind her rectangular framed glasses when she's thinking about something. Her voice gets really intense when she's explaining one of her findings. She was very serious about monster construction and has very bold theories behind everything. She also has a sense of humor, though, and she informed me that she planned to steal Ann from Andy as her little sister.

When I did the clue activity for Decoding Make-Believe, we had only been there for two weeks and she and Peter had already grouped together. When I walked by, they waved me over to look at the pictures, which they'd organized and lain out in rows. Mary Jane gestured at the circles criss-crossing the pictures, explaining that those were places where they overlapped—they all pointed toward the existence of Atlantis. This is exactly what I had hoped would happen—the pictures were randomly selected, and had no formal connection to each other, but they were making the connections themselves. That's story building, and it's an exercise in creative problem solving, and they executed it beautifully.

This was the first I'd really had a chance to interact with Peter. His parents were a little late that day, so I got to talk to him about his theories about why the mermaids had sunk Atlantis. He decided that the mermaids had colluded with Megaladon; the mermaids got Atlantean technology and the sharks got food. Or maybe the mermaids used to be Atlanteans, who had gotten trapped in the mechanical tails they'd made to help them hunt underwater. I learned that he knows a lot about sharks, a lot more than I do, and that he's interested in science. He plans to

be some kind of engineer. He has very exact mannerisms and cocks his head to one side when he's thinking. When he has an idea, his head perks up again and his eyes get really wide.

Mary Jane and Peter both contribute very thoughtfully to discussion. They both have very methodical, logical, flexible minds. It's a lot of fun to see them at work; they usually seem to really get into what we're doing. A concern that's come up is that they can be a little cliqueish. I'm not as worried about that as I am that Mary Jane in particular can be a little intense when she's figuring something out. This can intimidate kids who don't get it as fast, particularly younger kids, and I've been worried that she might make other kids feel inferior if they don't get it as quickly. I think she realizes the potential for this, though, and I've seen both her, Peter, Andy, and the other older kids all helping the younger kids when they need it.

Bain

I talked a lot about Bain in the discipline section. A lot of my interaction with him has, unfortunately, been in this capacity. I feel like I'm constantly trying to get him to cooperate. He is unfailingly very difficult. Looking beyond this, especially when I want to have a chance to hang out with all the other kids too, can be difficult. However, he is not just a difficult kid.

Bain has a ton of energy. I feel like a lot of problems could be solved if he could just give half of his energy to me. That can't happen, though, and so we both have to deal with it. Bain's behavior isn't just frustrating for us—the other students get really annoyed with him. Sometimes it's hard to blame them, but Bain can't always help it. He has a lot of trouble channeling all of his energy and I'm at a loss to help him.

When he stormed off and hid behind a desk after that girl told him to move, I sat down across from him on the floor. I don't want to make assumptions about how he's feeling, but I'm

getting this from what he told me. He told me that no one liked to be around him. He had the sense that all of the other kids were out to get him. While that's an exaggeration, I can't deny that the kids have been getting more and more annoyed with him the more disruptions he's caused in the program. I don't think that many of them really do like him. I doubt that's very different in class—he can be hard to deal with. He talks in an adversarial way, loudly and aggressively. A part of this is just his default; another part, I think, is that he is defensive in advance about what people think about him. When I gave him that note, he was afraid of being grounded. He kept accusing Andy (the kid who'd told me Bain'd punched him) of wanting him to get in trouble. He feels alone and rejected, and I'm not sure that he sees his role in that. Even if he does, he seems to feel that he's powerless to change it. It's heartbreaking.

I don't have a solution to that. But each of these kids is such a combination of heartbreak and hope; I've seen hope in him too. Once, when he didn't want to do the activity that everyone else was working on, I sat down next to him. Instead of insisting that he do what he was supposed to do (which happened to be the newspaper activity), I gave him options. He didn't like any of them. So, I asked him: "Well, what do you like?" He was quiet for a minute, so I thought he was just going to be sullen. Then he said, "Dinosaurs." "Dinosaurs!? You like dinosaurs? Great, let's find a book about dinosaurs!" He already knew where it was. He went and got it, and he copied out the drawings in his casebook, telling me facts about each dinosaur he drew. I had the chance to circulate a bit while he was occupied, and then I had him help me out with the snacks. He wasn't a problem at all for the rest of the time that day, which is remarkable. It felt like a breakthrough.

Looking forward

So there's a snapshot of what the other audience looks like. They are the soul of this enterprise. They're across the board in terms of current ability, interests, learning styles, temperaments, modes of expression, and ages. They are both the greatest inspiration and the greatest frustration for everything I've done this year with this project. I'm going to finish out the semester with them, and then I'm going to graduate. I have mixed feelings about abandoning them after a year of this.

I cannot guarantee that the program will continue. I have no concrete plans in place to keep it going. I have been so focused on getting things up and organized that I have not had the energy to ensure that there's a sustainable infrastructure to this program. I've included suggestions for how to go about its continuation in this document and I would love to see it continue. I hope to have solved some of these problems before the year ends, but I'm not sure who would be willing or able to take it on.

I have a few ideas. There have been conversations lately about the need for a youth arts movement in Greencastle. I've attended talks where we speculated the kinds of things that would have to happen in order for this to become a possibility. This center would house a number of arts workshops, ranging from theater to visual arts to creative writing. I envision it as happening in the space of around two weeks; students will rotate among two or three interests, all scheduled at a time that doesn't conflict with the others. At the end of each season, there will be a capstone gala, with performances, galleries, and readings. The dream is still vague, but I can envision a place for Letters to Make-Believe here.

A more immediate and practical alternative might be DePauw Community Service. The possibility of teaming up with The Castle to make a two-pronged program that would go under

the umbrella of DCS has been discussed. This would hopefully create a stable, flexible volunteer base that wouldn't go away as soon as the person spear-heading it graduates. This document could serve as a guide, and I have a few suggestions about how the structure would change in order to facilitate richer curriculum and the kind of volunteer culture I would like to see.

The process I envision for following years looks more like a team of leaders instead of one coordinator scrambling to compose lesson plans and make everything run smoothly every week. At the beginning, everyone will meet and determine what kinds of things they want to facilitate for the semester. They will spend the first meeting figuring out philosophical goals (or running with mine) and figuring out what they have to offer the kids. No one should be expected to teach things outside their comfort zone in this context, especially if they don't have a lot of experience teaching. I've done that; it never goes as well as when I'm teaching stuff I'm good at.

So, the first meeting should consist of everyone pooling their talents and goals; it should also produce a survey to bring into the kids who sign up for the program. The survey should be pretty simple; presumably, these kids haven't had much experience with arts programming and so might not know exactly what they want. But, if you ask about specific kinds of activities they like to do (acting, painting, writing) and/or specific content matter they like (superheroes, monsters, mermaids, Greek mythology, dinosaurs, astronomy, etc.), the results will probably be more helpful. Maybe have them vote on themes that the leaders come up with and also leave space for the kids to leave comments.

Collect those and meet once or twice more to construct lesson plans that work within that framework. If there are different arts or disciplines represented, talk about what each has to offer

for that, and then once you have a list, step back and decide a coherent progression. That way, each person can come up with the lesson plan for one or two weeks that involve their area of specialization. They'll have a chance to watch how other people approach leading a classroom and get to know the kids in both the capacity of teacher and helper, both giving directions and working with them on a closer level. Having five or six people who lead this process would take the pressure off of one person and would enrich the experience for the other volunteers and for the kids.

If I fail to keep it going next year or the year after, I still hope for this document to act as a case study. I hope that eventually, arts programming in the community will expand to include younger and, especially, older students. There is next to no arts programming for kids older than elementary school in the community and I think that there would be a lot of interest. I really feel that I could pretty easily adapt a lot of my lesson plans to accommodate older audiences.

If Letters to Make-Believe does survive, I hope for the sake of the students and for the volunteers that it is never static. I hope that the mission statement changes with every new student that joins. I hope that as kids are challenged to enter an open, creative space, that space is also challenged to change in order to accommodate the needs of that particular group. Whatever changes, though, whatever my audience goes on to do after putting this down, I want one thing to stick. I can't shake the memory of Mr. Sparks and the way that the kids respond when you ask them serious questions about what they're thinking about. Never underestimate the power of taking someone seriously.

The End.

Appendices

Appendix A

Lesson Plans

Outline 1

OUTLINE FOR THURSDAY, 9/26

- Warm-up and story (and snacks): 15 minutes
 - 1. Energies in connection with character types.
 - How does a bad guy move? How does a fairy move? How does a knight move? Princess? Frog? Etc.
 - 2. Yes, and...
 - 3. Group storytelling

BREAK INTO ROTATING GROUPS!!!! Breaking them into groups by grade; they're roughly equal and will be more comfortable with that.

- Worksheet: questions about what they think about stereotypical characters: 15 minutes
 - Discussion of their thoughts about characters
 - Have them draw a picture of the perfect villain/magical helper/hero/heroine/princess/fairy/etc.
- Theater activities: 15 minutes
 - Occupation game
 - Whose Line Style Interviewing
 - Group story telling (if don't get to it at beginning)
- Writing activity: 15 minutes
 - Advertisement: You are trying to write a story. The only problem is, you're missing a [choose from: hero/heroine, prince/princess, witch, evil stepmother, villain, monster, magical helper, magical trouble maker, etc.]. Write an advertisement for the perfect character type to put in the Magical Times.
- Closing activity: Charades or another story (until 4 if we need more fillers)

Outline 2

Week 4

- 3:00-3:05: Bathroom break
- 3:05-3:15: Break into 3 groups for activity
 - Write words on scraps of paper and mix them up in a hat or something. Words should be connected to going on a journey: things you'd take, do, be, go, etc. (For example, "fight," "dragon," "castle," etc.) Have the kids each take three or

more words, then use them to tell a story, or we could use this to give them a spring board for their writing prompt.

- 3:15-3:30: Circus Girl by Jack Sendack and snacks
- 3:30-4:00: Writing activity
 - Open by asking them where they would want to run away, places that fascinate them, things they want to do. Then hand out the prompt and tell them that they can draw a picture of where they want to go on the back.
 - Prompt: You are about to go on a journey, but you don't think your parents will approve. So you run away. Write a note to them explaining where you're going, why, and when (or if) you will come back.

Outline 3

Letters to Make-Believe: 11/12

MONSTERS: Week 1.

- Divide into 4 groups. Go around in a circle and say names and ask each kid why they want to join the program (if you could record this somehow, that'd be ideal, but that might be a distraction and so it's up to you). In each group, the leader informs the students of the situation. Monsters have invaded the school and we're trapped in the music room while their various tribes occupy the rest of the school. Give students pieces of paper and tell them to write down three of the monsters they think are roaming the halls. Leader collects them, mixes them up, and play charades; kids are allowed to act and roar/hiss/squeak like the monster, but aren't allowed to say words. After each kid has had a chance to act, we talk about monsters (sample questions below), and then regroup for story and snacks.
 - During this, rotate for bathroom breaks.
- Story: Where the Wild Things Are. And snack. Break into groups.
- Now we have to decide what's next. Each group is going to predict what would happen for a different course of action and come up with a story to illustrate it. I have cards cut up so that you can pass 2-5 to each kid (depending on how many show up – there will be at least 16, possibly more) and ask them to write a word on each. What kinds of words? They can be kinds of monsters, us-verbs (what we're doing), monster-verbs, monster adjectives, or just things that happen (ex. fire, flood, etc.) Collect those, shuffle them, and put them in the middle of the circle. Then either start the story yourself by picking up the first card and using it to say a sentence or two about the story, or let a volunteer start it. (Note: it would be nice if you could record your story on your phone and get it to me with the names of the kids in your group.)
- I suspect that we'll be out of time by this point, but if not, I'd like to ask the kids about the kinds of things they want to do in the program, what they'd want to write about, what

they want to read about, etc. So, if you have some extra time, I'd appreciate it if you could jot down a few notes about what they say.

Sample questions about monsters:

What do they look like? Sound like? Where do they come from? Why are they here? What do they want? Etc.

Outline 4

MONSTERS! Outline

Week 2: 11/19/13

- 3:00-3:15 –divide by grade and descramble group poems.
- 3:15-3:20 – sharing these poems and a few shel silverstein poems and snacks
- 3:20-3:30 – back into groups. Ask them to write down a list of things they think of when they think of a monster, focusing on the sounds they make and things they say and maybe the way they move/look. Have them choose their favorite word and go around in a circle saying each kid's word three times. Each time you say the word, have them say it in a different way: as if they're threatening, crying, pleading, demanding, whining, etc. or if they don't get the verbs, as if they're happy, sad, angry, hungry, scared, etc. When that's done talk about the way each word changes when you say it different ways.
- 3:30-4:00. Now give them an option: they can either descramble poems on their own (third graders will be given 1 poem, 4th graders will be given 2 or 3 mixed together, and 5th graders have to choose words from a pile to fit together), or they can write their own poem about a monster. I've included an example of what they can do. Also encourage them to use the way the monster sounds or moves or looks to shape what the poem looks like, sounds like.
 - An example of how to explain it to them might be explain it like a code. What sound does the monster make? It roars. Ok, what kind of monster is it? A troll. Okay; use the first letter of each word to imitate the sound and help you come up with stuff to say. Here's what I did with it:
 The troll roars;
 Before the roar, the troll wasn't scary.
 So he wandered all over the place,
 Looking for just the right scare
 Because a troll rarely owns a roaring sound
 So it steals the roars from lions.
 Secretly cats' awesome roar eats the troll
 It scars children angrily roaring everywhere
 Since the troll stole the lion's roar.

- So they can either do that or mix and match words to make a poem. Make sure I get a picture of it before they take it home, please.

Outline 5

2/12/2014

- 3:00-3:05: Attendance and bathroom break
- 3:05-3:30: Discussion (and maybe story)
 - Focus on what it means to be a detective. Talking points:
 - Famous detectives
 - What do detectives do? How do they do it? What do they look like? What do they act like? Whom do they work for? What kinds of things do they detect?
 - Connections between detective work and storytelling
 - What are the parts of a good story? What are the parts of a good case? How are they similar? How are they different? Where does a writer start? Where does a detective start?
 - For example, a writer starts at the beginning and works toward the end; the detective reconstructs the beginning by working backward from the end
 - Talk to them about how making a story clues: does it make sense? So what does that make these clues? Evidence? Or just building blocks for story? What other kinds of clues do we have? How do you know that it's true? Talk about Sherlock Holmes. People make EVERYTHING a story.
 - If we have time for a story, make it a debriefing about our detective agency
- 3:30-4:00: IDs and casebooks
 - Then inform them that we're making our own secret agent company. We have to decide what kind of agency we are; we can specialize in all sorts of different things (as in each kid can be a specialist of a different area; give them examples).
 - Our activity: making our ID cards and beginning our case books with a description of what kind of detective each of us is, what we specialize in, maybe some superpowers if we want, etc. That'll be the first page of the casebook. I'll collect them and pass them out every day to take attendance.
 - If we have time, transition into logic puzzles and have them solve a "case". Explain how to do them, make sure that there are "cases" for them to solve on the

front and a graph for them to solve it on the back. Then have them write out a “case study” (encourage creative license) for our collective “files” and if we have time, present each case to the small group (table) they’re at. Have volunteers take pictures or videos of the presentations.

Outline 6

Decoding Make-Believe:

Week 2

- 2:30: Meet in the front area of Roy O West
- 2:40: Arrive at Central Elementary School
- 3:00-3:10: Attendance, housekeeping, bathroom breaks
- 3:10-3:30: Break into two groups.
 - Group 1: Leader takes kids **who attended last week** into the reading circle. Have an opening discussion about plot, leading them toward the ways in which solving a mystery is similar to and different from a normal story. (In a regular story, you begin with an introduction: you know the characters and the situation, but you don’t know what’s going to happen. For a mystery, the plot runs in reverse: you have the conclusion, but don’t know how it happened. So you read clues to figure out the who, the what, the where, when, and other pertinent questions that the author answers for us in a regular story.) After this, the leader will read the first chapter of Encyclopedia Brown with them and give them logic puzzles. Explain those and their connection to deductive reasoning, and have them work on that until the other group is ready to meet up again.
 - Group 2: Group 2 will get a quick recap of last week, reading the letter from “The Boss,” making their DMB identity badges, and receiving their case books. On the first page or two of their case book, they will write their secret agent personal statement, telling about what made them decide to be a spy, a special ability they have, a story about how they saved the world once, etc.
- 3:30-4:00: Kids receive instructions as one group (if one group finishes before the other, groups can also get this separately; be flexible)
 - Groups of 2 or 3 kids will each choose a mystery to solve. Each kid will be given 4 or 5 “clues” from which they will solve the case. Here’s the catch (which we don’t tell them): the “clues” are just random facts about loosely related topics. The idea is that they’ll make them into their own unique stories from these “clues” because humans make stories out of everything. If this doesn’t go as smoothly as I plan, we can give them more clues or some advice.

Outline 7

- 2:30: Meet in the front area of Roy O West
- 2:40: Arrive at Central Elementary School
- 3:00-3:10: Attendance, housekeeping, bathroom breaks
- 3:10-3:30: Break into two groups.
 - Group 1: Leader takes kids **who attended last week** into the reading circle. Have an opening discussion about plot, leading them toward the ways in which solving a mystery is similar to and different from a normal story. (In a regular story, you begin with an introduction: you know the characters and the situation, but you don't know what's going to happen. For a mystery, the plot runs in reverse: you have the conclusion, but don't know how it happened. So you read clues to figure out the who, the what, the where, when, and other pertinent questions that the author answers for us in a regular story.) After this, the leader will read the first chapter of Encyclopedia Brown with them and give them logic puzzles. Explain those and their connection to deductive reasoning, and have them work on that until the other group is ready to meet up again.
 - Group 2: Group 2 will get a quick recap of last week, reading the letter from "The Boss," making their DMB identity badges, and receiving their case books. On the first page or two of their case book, they will write their secret agent personal statement, telling about what made them decide to be a spy, a special ability they have, a story about how they saved the world once, etc.
- 3:30-4:00: Kids receive instructions as one group (if one group finishes before the other, groups can also get this separately; be flexible)
 - Groups of 2 or 3 kids will each choose a mystery to solve. Each kid will be given 4 or 5 "clues" from which they will solve the case. Here's the catch (which we don't tell them): the "clues" are just random facts about loosely related topics (at the moment, stuff I'm making up about Atlantis, stuff from the National Geographic about elephants and anglerfish, and parts of a pseudo-Native American folk story). The idea is that they'll make them into their own unique stories from these "clues" because humans make stories out of everything. If this doesn't go as smoothly as I plan, we can give them more clues or some advice.
- There is a very real possibility that we'll run out of time before getting to all of this, but I really want to get to the last activity, so if it looks like we're running low on time, I'd rather the earlier activities be rushed than the last one.

Outline 8

Decoding Make-Believe

Week 6: 3/19/14

- 3:00-3:10: get organized. Make sure they know that it's spring break next week.
- 3:10-3:30ish: discussion

- Start out with paintings. Ask them what they think of the paintings. What is the mood? Do they tell a story? How does it feel to look at the painting? How does the color affect the painting?
- Then talk about specific colors. Ask them what they associate them with. Ask them why. Talk about warm vs. cool colors. Ask their favorite colors.
- 3:30-4:00: activity
 - Pass out the differently colored photos. Ask them what the person is feeling. Ask if the color gives them any clue what they're thinking about or looking at.
 - Give them a list of words and ask what color they would associate it with.
 - Spring
 - Summer
 - Fall
 - Winter
 - Gloomy
 - Sunny
 - Bravery
 - Fear
 - Anger
 - Sadness
 - Hope
 - Happiness
 - Fun
 - Danger
 - Secretive
 - Pride
 - Confidence
 - Greed
 - Love
 - Pure

- Next, ask what colors an artist might use if they were making a portrait of them. Ask them to make a self-portrait of themselves based on what they're feeling at that time.

After this activity, if there's time, ask them to use the same technique to tell a story. Tell them that, for example, they could draw a monster with a color that means hungry or angry and a hero with colors that mean scared and brave

Outline 9

Decoding Make-Believe:

4/9/2014

- 3-3:05: Attendance, Bathroom Break, Pizza Party announcement
- 3:05-3:30: Warm-up stuff
 - Cartoons in foreign languages (discussion about body language); or just silent movies?
 - Body energies
 - Charades
- 3:30-4:00
 - Make a silent movie
 - Have them write a short, 2 minute or less scene where they have to act out what's going on and we have to be able to figure it out
 - Give them a situation and have them figure out how to do it with body language.
 - Examples: robbing a bank, putting out a fire, sneaking out of the house, a failed proposal

Appendix B

Worksheets and Writing Prompts

Worksheet 1

What's your name? _____

Emergency phone number: _____ What grade are you in? _____

What's your favorite fairy tale? What kind of stories do you like? (Ghost stories, funny stories, hero stories, princess stories)

What's your favorite animal?

Would you rather fight a horse-sized duck or a hundred duck-sized horses?

Would you rather be as big as a house or small as a mouse?

What's your favorite made-up creature?

How about your favorite made-up character?

What animal would you want to be able to talk to?

If you could turn into an animal, what would it be?

What would you do as this animal?

Ask a question about something you're interested in.

Everyone has a special talent. What's yours? (Yes, it can be a superpower. And yes, you can make it up.)

If you don't already have an imaginary friend, make one up. Describe him/her/it.

[Back Page]

Write a fan letter to your favorite fairy tale character. Make sure to ask questions and to tell them why they're your favorite character.

Worksheet 2

Letters to Make-Believe: Week 2

What's your favorite kind of character? Are they funny, smart, pretty, brave, wicked?

What kind of character is Jack Frost? Hero? Bad guy? Magical mischief-maker?

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a hero?

If a hero were an ordinary guy, what job would he or she have?

What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a villain? What kind of things (personality traits, actions, looks) do you expect in a princess?

You're in trouble. You need some sort of magical help, and suddenly someone appears. Who is it and what are they like?

You're going on a long trip and you need a sidekick. You can choose anyone in the world – who do you choose and why? (Feel free to make them up.)

[Back]

You are trying to write a story. The only problem is, you're missing a (hero/heroine, prince/princess, witch, evil stepmother, villain, monster, magical helper, magical trouble maker, etc.). Write an advertisement for the perfect character to put in the Magical Times.

Worksheet 3

Make-Believe Classifieds!

You're trying to write a story, but you lost all your characters! Put up ads in the Make-Believe Times so that people can apply for the job.

Worksheet 4

Letters to Make-Believe: Week 4

You're running away! Write a note to your parents explaining why you're leaving, where you're going, and what you plan to do there.

Worksheet 5

I adapted the Monster Dictionary Mythical Creatures Guide.com. This is not included in the citations because I would not suggest this source; it's got a bunch of monsters from different cultures in one spot, but they're not very accurate and need a lot of adjustment to work with kids.

Try going to the library and pulling a monster or two from several different cultures; this is what I would have done if I'd had more time designing this one.

Worksheet 5

Decoding Make-Believe Framing Device

Dear Recruits,

Welcome to the Decoding Make-Believe. Here at the DMB (Decoding Make-Believe), we will be training you to become detectives. We investigate unusual sorts of mysteries to solve invisible cases. What do I mean by invisible cases? I mean cases that no one else sees, even though they're right in front of their eyes. I mean mysteries that seem imaginary, but that have real clues and codes. We have to find the story in them, or sometimes find the mystery in the story. We find mysteries in books, we ask if "imaginary" things are really so imaginary, we find codes everywhere: art, music, literature, even people's faces. These are the things you'll be learning to do.

My associates who will be training you specialize in various fields of investigation. They will lead you in activities that will help you master the skills you need to succeed when you're decoding make-believe. These might seem like games, but they're not: they're very serious. The reader of this letter is presumably Jessica, AKA the Storyteller. She has designed the super-sleuthing training program this semester. Listen to her (and the other DMB Agents with her) well and follow her instructions carefully if you wish to gain status as a DMB Investigative Detective.

To start out, Jessica will discuss the nature of your assess your interest. She will explain some official DMB definitions of detective work. Then, you will need to complete some paperwork. In order to work for the DMB, you'll need to have a badge. You will design the layout for that and specify what kind of investigations you wish to specialize in. When you turn it back in to us, we'll take your picture so that we can complete your ID and we'll hand you your casebook.

Your casebook is where you'll be recording all of the cases and codes we'll be working on this semester. Today, your job is to design the front cover and to use the first page or two to explain what got you interested in detective work. What kinds of questions do you have? What secret plots do you want to uncover? Do you want to work in the extraterrestrial department? The superhero secret identity department? Do you want to defeat a particular supervillain? Are you interested in uncovering animal politics? Finding encrypted histories in old paintings? Do you want to work in international affairs and study the stories of other countries for clues? The options are limitless; just ask the agents there about their specialties. They can help you if you're having trouble deciding. This will count as your personal statement as a detective. In it, you should outline your goals, your experience, and your motivation, as well as talk about any special skills or connections you already have.

Alright, this is all the information you're cleared for right now. Complete your tasks today and then await further instructions.

---The Boss

/Famous detectives

- What do detectives do? How do they do it? What do they look like? What do they act like? Whom do they work for? What kinds of things do they detect?
- Connections between detective work and storytelling
 - What are the parts of a good story? What are the parts of a good case? How are they similar? How are they different? Where does a writer start? Where does a detective start?
 - For example, a writer starts at the beginning and works toward the end; the detective reconstructs the beginning by working backward from the end
 - Talk to them about how making a story clues: does it make sense? So what does that make these clues? Evidence? Or just building blocks for story? What other kinds of clues do we have? How do you know that it's true? Talk about Sherlock Holmes. People make EVERYTHING a story.
 - If we have time for a story, make it a debriefing about our detective agency

Worksheet 6

Decoding Make-Believe: Week 4

Cracking Codes and Ciphers

Some of the most important messages are secret. Leaders of countries, spies, superheroes, poets: they all speak in secret languages. Learning how to send secret messages is an important part of your secret agent training here at the DMB. Using codes and ciphers is one way of writing messages that only a few people can understand.

A code isn't just a secret message—a code is “any symbol or signal used to represent, or communicate something else. Any word could be considered a code word” (America’s CryptoKids). What other symbols or signals can you think of that could be used as code? [Cues—images, sounds, objects, nonverbal clues, music, etc.] For example, the word “cookie” is a code for a baked good made of flour, eggs, butter, sugar, and sometimes other ingredients. “Pizza” and “shirt” are also just codes. What’s the difference between these codes and the kind of codes that spies use? [These examples are codes that everyone understands; spies need to use codes that only a few people understand.] “A code affects the word, not the individual letters.”

A cipher, on the other hand, “is a way to make a word or message secret by changing or rearranging the letters in the message.” In some ciphers, you just scramble the letters so that the reader has to unscramble them. In other ciphers, you replace the letters with other letters or symbols. To understand a cipher, you need to be able to figure out the key.

It’s really hard to break a cipher. It usually helps you if you know something about the message, like who sent it, whom they sent it to, what language it’s in, a key word, context, etc. After this, you can try to count how many times each letter is used to try to guess what letter it is. For complicated cryptograms, we use math and computers.

Examples: In 1467, Leon Battista Alberti invented the cipher wheel, which had two wheels with the alphabet on it. You could match them up so that the inner letter stood for the outer letter to make different codes. During the Civil War, the armies used different colored flags to send messages by waving them in different patterns. Morse code allowed messages to be sent through sequences of light or sound. Slaves sometimes used the patterns in quilts to send messages about escaping to the north.

Work Cited:

<http://www.nsa.gov/kids/home.shtml>

Activity

It is May 2014. Dr. Barbra Robinson has just begun working at the Snow City Public Hospital. During her first week, she examined a child whose fingernails had begun changing color and whose eyes were starting to lose color. The little boy refused to talk, only saying “Errrrr” or growling when someone said anything to him. His mother told the doctor that since the snow had trapped him inside, he had been watching a lot of a strange TV show and eating the glow-in-the-dark cookies they advertised. She said that the TV show just showed the cookie monster singing in another language, bright colors, and strange, spinning letters that made words that just looked like nonsense. The next week, three more parents came in; their children were drooling purple goo and their eyes were starting to turn white. The week after that, a child who was starting to grow blue fur tried to eat her examining table. Finally, when a whole roomful of parents brought children with glowing

eyes and black teeth, walking slowly and trying to eat magazines, tires, and even their pets, Dr. Robinson had no choice but to investigate the TV show that seemed to be causing all of this. Can you decode the message she found? How can she stop this strange disease!

Me cookie monster. Me like cookies. Kids like cookies. Cookies make kids strong. Cookies make zombies. Zombie cookies. Cookie zombies. Cookie zombie army take over world for cookie monster. Cookie monster king of cookie zombies! One rule: no fruit or veggies. Make human again. Eat more cookies!

Appendix C

Miscellaneous Documents

First Callout Letter

Happily Ever After, Says Who?

Hi Parents,

My name is Jessica Maginity, a senior at DePauw University. Starting next Thursday, September 19th, I will be running an afterschool creative writing program at Central. There is no charge and your child would just stay after school. As I told the kids, we will be reading fairytales, playing theater games, and doing fun writing activities. It will last for an hour after school every Thursday, from the nineteenth until October 31st. The theme for this grading period is "Fairytale Characters" and we'll be focusing on letter writing, but that is subject to change with the feedback of the kids. I will be doing this all year, but am dividing it up into four sections; the next one will begin two weeks after Fall Break and hopefully Spellbowlers can come to this one. If this sounds like something your child would be interested in, please sign the permission slip below and have your child return it to his/her teacher.

Thank you,

Jessica

Child's Name: _____ Grade: _____ Favorite Fairy Tale: _____

Parent's Name: _____ Parent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Letter 2

Dear Parents,

Hello. I am writing to let you know that the extremely large number of children attending Letters to Make-Believe (the afterschool Thursday creative writing program), we will not be able to host K-2. Approximately 70 children were there on Thursday, 9/19. Unfortunately, the program cannot support such a broad age range with so many kids. Furthermore, it has become clear that the program will not suit many of the younger kids' needs and interests. I sincerely apologize for this change and any disappointment it causes.

Regretfully,

Jessica Maginity

Letter 3

Hi Parents,

I'm writing to let you know that because of several concerns voiced about Halloween, the creative writing program Letters to Make-Believe will not be meeting this Thursday, October 31st. I apologize if this causes any inconveniences. We will be meeting again next week, Thursday November 7th.

The week after November 7th, we are starting a new unit of Letters to Make-Believe. There will be a few changes in how we are running things, most notably we will be meeting on Tuesdays, not on Thursdays. It will still run from after school until 4. Another change will be snacks – I have been providing snacks for the children up till now, but I don't think I can sustain that all year, and so while I might bring snacks occasionally, I will be asking if parents would mind volunteering to bring snacks. This information will be restated on the new permission slips, which will be passed out to all of the children in grades 3-5 next week. It is important that your child turn in the new permission slip, even if they already attend, because this is a new unit and we are opening it up to more kids. The number of kids we will be able to admit depends on the number of volunteers I have, and so will be first come, first serve.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me at jessicamaginity_2015@depauw.edu. Thank you and Happy Halloween!

Jessica Maginity

Letter 4

Letters to Make-Believe: MONSTERS!

Hi Parents,

Hello – I'm Jessica Maginity. Earlier this year, I began a storytelling program at Central Elementary called Letters to Make-Believe. The program is for students divided into two sections this semester, and the first one is coming to an end this Thursday, 11/8. We will begin the next section next week; it will meet for an hour after school on Tuesdays and will run from 11/12 until 12/10. Your child can stay after school and you will need to come pick them up at 4:00.

We read stories, play story-telling, reading comprehension, and theater games, and work on creative writing prompts. This month, we will be talking about different kinds of monsters from mythology, folk lore, and popular culture, and encouraging children to think about them in different ways. So, it should be good for kids who enjoy reading, writing, or imaginative activities in general; I try to cater it to their interests within those boundaries. Also, I provided snacks every week for the last section, but I don't think that's sustainable for the whole year, so if you would be willing and interested to help us give the kids snacks one week, please indicate below. I'll provide them the first day and then I'll have the kids sign up for weeks on the first day and send home information. (On this subject, please indicate any allergies (or other important info) your student has on the back of this sheet.)

In order for the kids who are really interested in what we're doing to get as much out of the experience as possible, we will only be accepting a certain number of children, depending on the number of volunteers I have. As it stands now, I can admit thirty students; I am still waiting to hear back from some potential volunteers, but I would expect for the number to stay in that ballpark. Students who weren't able to participate in the last section will have a slight preference, but it will mostly come down to first-come, first-serve. If this sounds like something that your child will enjoy, please fill out the form below and have them turn it in by Monday, 11/11. You can e-mail me at jessicamaginity_2015@depauw.edu for questions or comments.

Thank you,

Jessica Maginity

Student's Name: _____ Signature: _____

Parent's Name: _____ Signature: _____

E-mail (optional): _____

Would you be interested in providing snacks one week? _____

Emergency contacts:

Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Phone: _____

Letter 5

Hello Parents!

I'm excited to have your student, _____, in Letters to Make-Believe! Just to reiterate the information I sent out earlier, we will be meeting every Tuesday from 11/12 until 12/10 from 3:00-4:00. Your student will play a crucial role in containing the monster invasion of Central Elementary. If you indicated that you're willing to provide snacks, I'll send a schedule with the week I'd like for you to bring them.

Letters to Make-Believe is actually my senior thesis project for the Honor Scholar program and I need to include some documentation. If you sign below, you are indicating your permission for me to take pictures of your student and maybe include them in my thesis or other presentations of the program. Also, if you give me your e-mail address, I will be sending out a newsletter summarizing what we do every week, so if you wish to receive those, please give me your e-mail address. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to e-mail me at jessicamaginity_2015@depauw.edu.

Student's Name: _____ Grade/Teacher: _____

Parent's Name: _____ Signature: _____

E-mail address: _____

Letter 6

Letters to **Make-Believe**: **Decoding Make-Believe**

Hello Students and Parents,

My name is **Jessica Maginity**. I'm writing you looking for recruits in my super-sleuth training program. In the previous two sessions of **Letters to Make-Believe**, we played some storytelling games, read stories, and made some monsters. **Now in Decoding Make-Believe** we're going to work with logic puzzles, crack codes, hone our deductive skills by reading detective stories, write our own codes, and talk about how all stories and language itself are codes to crack and make up some codes of our own. **Then**, if we can get to it, we'll have some real mysteries to solve which our sleuths-in-training will help us stage and solve (ex.: murder mysteries).

So, that's a **general overview** of I want to do; here are the **details**. The program is open to **3rd–5th graders**. The program will last from **February 12th–April 30th**, with a week or two in the middle taken out for spring break (about which I will notify you in my next note). At present, I only have enough volunteers to offer the program to **25 students**, and so I need permission slips back in by **February 10th** so that I can contact you with another note to let you know if your student is in the program; hopefully everyone who signs up can be. Students will meet after school in the library on **Wednesdays** and parents need to come pick up their students at **4:00 pm**. I also ask that parents sign up to provide **snacks for one week** if you are able to do so; I will provide snacks the **first week**. In my next note, I will include a schedule with who is signed up for which week and so if one week is better/worse than others for you to do so, please indicate that on the back of the permission slip. One final thing: this program is my senior thesis, and so I may take some pictures and videos during the workshops. Your signature indicates your permission for me to use them in my thesis unless you indicate otherwise on the permission slip. If you have any questions/comments/suggestions, please feel free to e-mail me at jessicamaginity_2015@depauw.edu. I'm really looking forward to hearing from you!

Thank you,

Jessica

Parent Name: _____ Signature: _____

Student Name: _____ Grade/Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Emergency Contact 1 Name: _____ Number: _____

Emergency Contact 2 Name: _____ Number: _____

Would you be able to provide snacks? _____ Do you have a preferred week? _____

Can I use pictures of your child? _____

Does your child have any allergies or conditions I should know about? _____

Letter 7

Decoding Make-Believe:

IMPORTANT SCHEDULING INFORMATION

Dear Parents,

Hello; I hope everyone had a good spring break. Due to an error in scheduling, I don't have any volunteers scheduled for this week (Wednesday, April 2nd) to help me out with Decoding Make-Believe. So, unfortunately, I'm afraid we won't be meeting this week. We'll meet again *next* Wednesday (April 9th) at the normal time. I apologize that this is so short notice and hope it's not an inconvenience.

Thank you,

Jessica Maginity: jessicamaginity_2015@depauw.edu

Letter 8

Decoding Make-Believe: End of the Year

Hi Parents,

So, I have something special planned for the last day of Decoding Make-Believe, April 30th. On this day, we're going to be having a pizza and movie party to celebrate an awesome semester of code-breaking and story-making. Instead of being picked up at 4 as usual, students will be picked up at **4:30** so that we have time to eat and watch a movie. I'm asking that **parents donate \$5** to cover the cost of pizza and drinks. If you are unable to do that, or would need to pick your child up early, please let me know via e-mail (or by sending a note with your student) and we can figure something out; I want everyone who wants to come to be able to attend.

Please have your student turn in this permission slip with \$5 by Wednesday, April 24th so that I know how many people to plan for. I would prefer that you bring it in to the office, but it's also fine to bring it in to the program.

Thank you,

Jessica (jessicamaginity_2015@depauw.edu)

Student Name: _____ Grade/Teacher: _____

Parent Name: _____ Parent Signature: _____

Appendix E
MONSTER Survey

What grade are you in? 3rd

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

Because I like make-
Believe.

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

everything

~~What have we done that you did not like?~~

~~No~~

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

I don't No.

Do you have any ideas for next time?

I want to do more activities like...

find I do as

I want to read more stories like...

Jack N. Stine

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

☒ D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

don't

Do you have anything else to say?

No

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!



What grade are you in? 4

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

I thought it sounded fun.

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

Ate animal crackers.

What have we done that you did not like?

Nothing!

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

No.

Do you have any ideas for next time?

TO read a novel each time.

I want to do more activities like...

Drawing.

I want to read more stories like...

about monsters

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Make a play!!

Do you have anything else to say?

NO!!
😊

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

What grade are you in? 4th

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

I like make believe stuff.

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

I liked making up monsters the most.

What have we done that you did not like?

I did not like unscrambling the poem.

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

I have learned about monsters.

Do you have any ideas for next time?

We could act out a play.

I want to do more activities like...

acting out a play.

I want to read more stories like...

fairy tales

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

No

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

What grade are you in?

4

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

1st of all, your my sister and 2nd of all,
I really like non fiction and fantasy
stories.

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

I liked the story game.

What have we done that you did not like?

I did not like to unscramble
the poems.

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

I learned about different
monsters.

Do you have any ideas for next time?

I think you should ask Quin
to take @ the game Once Upon A Time
to Letters to Make believe.

I want to do more activities like...

Theatre games.

I want to read more stories like...

Land of Stories and Spiderwick.

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

I LOVE this program!

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

What grade are you in? 5th

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

I think it is awesome!

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

Monster dictonarys

What have we done that you did not like?

Nothing

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

No

Do you have any ideas for next time?

No

I want to do more activities like...

Watch movies

I want to read more stories like...

The book

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

☐ A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

☐ B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

☒ C Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

☐ D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

☐ E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

What grade are you in? 3rd

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

I did it because I
thought it would be fun!

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

My favorite thing we have
done is playing shades.

What have we done that you did not like?

Making Monster stories and
dictionaries.

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

Do you have any ideas for next time?

Making monster Christmas
trees

I want to do more activities like...

I want to read more stories like...

the boy who cried wolf!

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

It's very cool here!

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

What grade are you in? 5th

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

Because it is Fun and I love
to make-believe.

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

Making books.

What have we done that you did not like?

Nothing

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

Yes I have learned to be a
creative writer.

Do you have any ideas for next time?

write many stories

I want to do more activities like...

The thing were we wrote things
and made a story off of it.

I want to read more stories like...

Bakugan Battle Brawlers.

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A. Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

I love reading enrichment.

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

What grade are you in?

4

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

because I like to write

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

made monsterbooks

What have we done that you did not like?

made a poem

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

No

Do you have any ideas for next time?

Make a monster out of paper

I want to do more activities like...

draw

I want to read more stories like...

Christmas

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

NO

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

What grade are you in? 3rd

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

to read

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

eat

What have we done that you did not like?

write

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

NO

Do you have any ideas for next time?

NO

I want to do more activities like...

puppet shows

I want to read more stories like...

tinkerbell

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

☒ A. Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

AO

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

MJB

What grade are you in? 5

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

Cause I have a big imagination

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

Write stories

What have we done that you did not like?

Nothing.

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

Yes, all about monsters

Do you have any ideas for next time?

Kind of.

I want to do more activities like...

Model clay monsters

I want to read more stories like...

I don't really like reading.

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

☒ C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

No except I LOVE THIS
PROGRAM!

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

Me

What grade are you in? 5

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

Sounded cool

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

Make books

What have we done that you did not like?

You read stories to us

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

NO

Do you have any ideas for next time?

NO

I want to do more activities like...

do more group work

I want to read more stories like...

funny stories

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

☒ D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

What is going to be the next
subject for next semester.

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

Riley S. SF

3rd

What grade are you in? _____

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

I like to make lots of
stuff up.

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

Make monster book lits,

What have we done that you did not like?

Making really hard poems.

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

Do you have any ideas for next time?

I think we should make
cardboard monsters.

I want to do more activities like...

I want to read more stories like...

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

☒ B: Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

- 1 What grade are you in? 3
- 2 Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?
I Like Make-Believe Stories.
- 3 What is your favorite thing that we have done?
write a monster book.
- 4 What have we done that you did not like?
Nothing
- 5 Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?
yes I have learned something, Monsters are non-real
- 6 Do you have any ideas for next time?
eat chips
- 7 I want to do more activities like...
making up a monster book
- 8 I want to read more stories like...
MONSTER stories.

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

☒ B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

Name Kimberlee Mae Emmert

What grade are you in? 3rd grade

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

Ate food + wrote and colored

What have we done that you did not like?

Nothing

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

Yes, I learned different words that
monsters say.

Do you have any ideas for next time?

No

I want to do more activities like...

play games

I want to read more stories like...

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

☒ B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

What grade are you in?

5

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

Because it is fun

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

created paper monster

What have we done that you did not like?

nothing

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

I have learned a lot
of different monster

Do you have any ideas for next time?

Play sherads more

I want to do more activities like...

play sherads

I want to read more stories like...

funny monster stories

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

Do you have anything else to say?

This is the
best after school activity
ever!!!!

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

Allie

What grade are you in? 3rd

Why did you sign up for Letters to Make-Believe?

I thought I would like it.

What is your favorite thing that we have done?

story and snacks

What have we done that you did not like?

writing

Do you feel like you've learned anything? If so, what?

yes I have I have learned

Do you have any ideas for next time?

To not write

I want to do more activities like...

games

I want to read more stories like...

Holiday storys

What sounds like more fun (circle one)? A B C D E

A: Decoding Make-Believe, where we are spies decoding stories. We might read cool stories, learn about codes, work on mind puzzles, and maybe even make our own language.

B. Make-Believe Around the World: every week, we'll read a story from a different country (you guys can help me choose) and do activities that go along with it.

C. Make-Believe Animals: every week, I'll bring a story about a specific animal (you guys can suggest them) and we'll make a book of animals, writing a story about each one.

D. None of the above. Come up with something better!

E. Have a better idea? Tell me! Write your idea here:

To playgames everytime.

Do you have anything else to say?

No

Thank you guys for coming here and being awesome! I've had a lot of fun; I hope you have too! Merry Christmas!

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